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Writing animals, speaking animals: the  
displacement and placement of the animal in  
medieval literature.



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## DEDICATION

To my parents for their unwavering love, and for daring us to believe that all things are possible. To my wife Clare, and sons James and Ethan for making it all worthwhile. To my sister Caroline for believing that it *does* matter. To my beloved dog Flash, who is missed so much: ‘In that day I will make a covenant with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air ... I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy’

(Hosea 2. 18 – 19).

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the way the absence of moral consideration of the animal in Christian doctrine is evident in Middle English literature. A fundamental difference between the theology and literature of the medieval period is literature's capacity to present and theorise positions that cannot, for various reasons, be theorised in the official discourses provided by commentators and theologians. Patterns of excluding the animal from moral consideration by Christianity are instigated with the rejection of the ethics of late Neoplatonism. Highlighted by Neoplatonists, and evident in the stylistic differences in reading scripture and philosophy, is an early Christian ideological predisposition toward purely humanocentric concerns. The disparity between a definite Hellenic ethic of the animal and its absence in Christian thought is most evident in the contrast between an outward looking Neoplatonic understanding of creation, and the closed matrix of scholastic interpretative thought. Influential textual representations of the universe require that creation is interpreted through a fideistically enclosed system of signs. The individual must have faith before approaching knowledge. The animal is placed into a system dominated by the primacy of faith in God, which paradoxically produces the predetermined answers supplied by Christian doctrine and selective scriptural and doctrinal suppositions. In literary texts, the animal provides an obvious method of Christian debate. Contemporary theological values, such as the doctrinal commonplace of comparing man with animal in the corporeal context highlights the uncomfortable similarity to, yet prescribes that man aspire to distance himself from, the animal. The primacy of man and the importance of his salvation, is a doctrine which countermands the theocentric basis of Christian theology, in which God is understood as a presence in all his creation. Such conflicting perspectives result in animals in medieval literature being used to test theological and philosophical parameters, illustrating the inadequacy of sharp theological boundaries, and demonstrating the ability of literary expression to escape that which has already been enclosed.



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## PREFACE

In this thesis, I have followed the academic conventions outlined in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (5<sup>th</sup> edition) edited by Joseph Gibaldi (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999). The subject matter of the thesis has required some considerable dependence upon biblical analogues and authorities. In the interests of working within the medieval literary tradition, and with textual material contemporary to the period, scriptural citations are extracted from the Latin vulgate bible: *Biblia Sacra Vulgatæ Editionis*, Sixti V Pont. Max. iussu Recogniti et Clementis VIII (Torino: Marietti, 1959). To use the King James Version would have been anachronistic to the period covered by the thesis, though in addition the King James Version often varies slightly in sense, and on occasion considerably, in substance. In these cases, I have provided citation from both in order to demonstrate the differences between the two: *The New King James Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). My use of Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiæ* is essential to my discussion of the displacement of the animal in medieval literature, and quotations are taken predominantly from a scholarly Latin edition: *Summa Theologiæ*, cura et studio Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis S. pii Pp. V issu confectum recognita, 5 vols. (Ottawa: 1941-1945). In some instances however, reference to the *Summa Theologiæ* is complementary to a broader line of argument and for the sake of brevity in these cases I have used a modern English translation: *Summa Theologiæ: A Concise Translation*, edited and translated by Timothy McDermott (Texas: Allen Christian Classics, 1991).

Since completing the initial research relating to canon formation and the exclusion of Hellenic ethics from Christian thought in chapter one and its relevant appendixes, a significant work has been published which touches on many of these areas, and at times, maintains a similar thesis – though with a much broader parameter of discussion. This edition is Charles Freeman's *The Closing of the Western Mind: The*

*Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason* (London: Heinemann, 2002). In the interests of transparency, where my material is similar to his I have drawn attention to the correspondence.

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on Bartholomaeus Anglicus' literal sense encyclopaedia *De Proprietatibus rerum* (*On the Properties of Things*) compiled around the date 1245. While of central importance to the second chapter, this work has been invaluable to the thesis as a whole. The *DPR* is Bartholomaeus' most notable manuscript and is the largest and most comprehensive work of its type. It comprises the encyclopaedic categorisation of known creation into a Latin *compilatio* designed both for use with the technique of scholastic *Lectio*, and as a reference text for scholarly clerics. I use the 1975 edition *On the Properties of Things a Critical Text: John Trevisa's Translation of De proprietatibus rerum of Bartholomaeus Anglicus*, edited by M. C. Seymour. John Trevisa's 1398 translation constitutes a prime example of a vernacular *summa*, its conventions arising directly from the Latin original, and is the best known and most used by writers in the Middle English period.<sup>1</sup> It provides analogues and source material, which have proved invaluable to this thesis. In 1897, R. Steel makes the earliest critical claim for its impact, citing textual examples which demonstrate its influence through the medieval period and into the early modern period including writers such as Shakespeare, Jonson, Spencer, Marlowe and Lyly.<sup>2</sup> Later Matrod's statement of 1912, that 'without the *DPR* the works of Shakespeare would not have existed', is a notorious overemphasis, moderated by Boyer in 1919. Boyer recognises the importance of the *DPR* but delimits its influence to a source of scientific knowledge for medieval and Elizabethan writers, which may provide assistance to scholarship's understanding of 'difficult' passages.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, D. C. Greetham observes that the *DPR* deserves its accepted

<sup>1</sup> See Traugott Lawler 'On the Properties of John Trevisa's Major Translations' in *Viator* 14, p. 268 ff.

<sup>2</sup> R. Steele, ed., *Medieval Lore: an epitome of the science, geography, animal and plant folk-lore and myth of the middle age; being classified gleanings from the encyclopedia of Bartholomew Anglicus* (London: William Morris & Stock, 1893) p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> H. Matrod, 'Roger Bacon et Bartholomaeus Anglicus,' in *Etudes Franciscaines*, 28 (1912) pp. 478 - 79.

sobriquet of ‘Shakespeare’s encyclopaedia.’<sup>4</sup> At the time of the compilation of the *DPR* in 1245 limited access to books, as well as their prohibitive cost, prompted the assemblage of many such encyclopaedias where a multiple of authorities and points of view were presented in a single, easily accessible work or textbook for scholars and preachers who had no quicker or easier form of reference. By the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, libraries were still very rare, and encyclopaedia came to be prized for the extracts from hundreds of books which they contained, and to which the student could not otherwise hope to gain access. Elizabeth Brockhurst less generously comments that ‘a compilation presented in an orderly fashion offers a short cut to knowledge to the lazy-minded, and leads the genuine student on to more serious study.’<sup>5</sup>

Though only briefly, in places I refer to the *Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus*, edited by J. P. Migne, (Paris, 1844 -1864); unless otherwise stated citations are reproduced from the *Patrologia Latina* electronic database version, Copyright © (Chadwyck - Healey Inc., 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> D. C. Greetham, ‘The Concept of Nature in Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Fl 1230)’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41 (1980) pp. 663 - 677.

<sup>5</sup> Brockhurst. Elizabeth. J., ‘Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ “De Proprietatibus Rerum” ‘, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, (University of London, 1952) p. 1. While the earliest Latin manuscript in England is MS. Bodlian Ashmore N. 1512 (Nov. 1296) Trevisa’s English translation is dated 1398. Still popular in its time was Steven Batman’s edition. *Batman vppon Bartholome his Booke De proprietatibus rerum*, (London: East, 1582, British Museum). John Hankins’ cites Batman’s edition as the analogue to English medieval and Renaissance thought, providing material on the animal, soul, corporeal senses, geometry, and the effect of the humours on the body. See John Hankins, *Backgrounds of Shakespeare’s Thought* (London: The Harvester Press, 1978). Trevisa’s translation was finally printed in three editions by Wynkyn de Worde, 1491, 1495, 1496 (?); for a discussion see Brockhurst pp. 52 - 64.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abst.</i>	Porphyry, <i>On Abstinence from Animal Food</i>
<i>AC</i>	Porphyry, <i>Against the Christians</i>
Aristotle	<i>Gen(eration of Animals)</i> ; <i>Hist(ory of Animals)</i> ; <i>Parts (of Animals)</i> ; <i>Mov(ement of Animals)</i> ; <i>(Pol)itics</i> ; <i>Met(aphysics)</i> ; <i>(Cat)egories</i> .
Augustine	<i>(C)onfessions</i> ; <i>DCD, De civitate Dei / City of God</i> ; <i>DDoC, De doctrina Christiana</i> ; <i>DMA, The Teacher</i> ; <i>DLA, De libero arbitrio</i> .
<i>Carle</i>	<i>Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle</i>
<i>Cloud</i>	Julian of Norwich, <i>Cloud of Unknowing</i>
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians (NT)
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians (NT)
<i>CP</i>	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
Deut.	Deuteronomy
<i>DPR</i>	<i>On the Properties of Things</i> , John Trevisa's Translation of <i>De proprietatibus rerum</i> of Bartholomaeus Anglicus
Eph.	Ephesians (NT)
Ex.	Exodus (OT)
Gal.	Galatians (NT)
Gen.	Genesis (OT)
GK	<i>The Green Knight</i>
<i>Gow.</i>	<i>Sir Gowther</i>
GP	General Prologue to <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
Inf.	Dante, <i>Inferno</i>
KnT	The Knight's Tale
<i>Mar.</i>	<i>The Marriage of Sir Gawain</i>
Matt.	Matthew (NT)
<i>NCE</i>	<i>New Catholic Encyclopaedia</i>
NT.	New Testament
<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Octavian</i>
OT.	Old Testament
PardT	The Pardoner's Tale
ParsT	The Parson's Tale
<i>Piers</i>	William Langland, <i>Piers Plowman</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>Proh.</i>	<i>Prohemium</i> , or preface, to <i>De proprietatibus rerum</i>
Ps.	Psalms (OT)
Prov.	Proverbs (OT)
<i>Rag.</i>	<i>The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle</i>

RB	Rule of Saint Benedict
Rev.	Revelation (NT)
Rom.	Romans (NT)
<i>SGGK</i>	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
Tim.	Timothy (NT)
<i>ST</i>	St Thomas Aquinas <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
WBT	The Wife of Bath's Tale



## INTRODUCTION

The medieval intellect was adept at interpreting the animal symbolically, though animals in medieval texts and images rarely carry a corresponding range of significance from one manuscript to another. While drawing on much current literary and historical study of the non-human animal, which tends to focus on its symbolic value, this is not the main area of analysis of this thesis. Rather, the thesis posits questions about the status of the animal in medieval doctrine and literature; about how it should be read theologically, about how the animal is excluded from ethical consideration, and how ultimately such questions are examined in medieval literature. From the time of Christian canon formation animals are excluded from ethical consideration in the official discourses of theology and philosophy, while oversimplistic doctrinal conceptions of the animal are worked out in medieval literature. This is unmistakably evident in a range of texts, from bestiaries and encyclopaedias, to chivalric romances where the interrelationship between the human animal and the non-human is scrutinised. Working from within the medieval 'commentary' tradition, the thesis makes the central point that the difference between theology and literature is medieval literature's capacity to present and theorise positions that cannot, for various reasons, be theorised in official discourses.

While it would be too universalising to treat poetic fiction and theological allegory collectively under the banner of Christian semiotics, the two must be seen as corresponding in many respects. The fictional texts dealt with in the thesis are analysed in conjunction with theological and philosophical material in order to highlight shared theological values and understandings between the two, and in some cases, the material presents notable similarities. Theologians such as Aquinas deal with the realm of theology - not fiction - and there is an essential medieval distinction between scriptural and poetic modes of interpretation, which I discuss below in appropriate contexts. Nevertheless, the gap between the two is often narrow, and such

a distinction is one that the poet Robert Henryson, for example, plays with wittily, by highlighting the commonplace theological doctrine of comparing man to animal as the justification for his use of animal fables. His figurative context combines theology and fiction to draw attention to the theologically defined similarity between human and animal in the corporeal world, and does so by the use of strategic representations of verbal relationships. In doing so, he generates a discourse combining ontological hierarchies with man's animal nature. In this respect, the theoretical space between theology and fiction can be seen to be of questionable size, especially given Augustine's assertions that all words and things may only ever be seen in fictional terms, and never truly represent actuality.

In the theological context, biblical uses of the animal and subsequent exegesis can be seen to depend upon the metaphorical correlation between man and animal, and to dictate the way that the animal is used in fictional contexts. Secular hermeneutics in the Middle Ages retain the idea of relating the individual work to a larger purpose into which pattern it meaningfully fits. Between that past reception, however, and medieval attempts to understand it, the text will inevitably generate more interpretations. Scriptural references to animals often serve to illustrate types of humans and character traits, which then become commonplace in medieval poetry. One of the most striking examples is the snake, who is seen as both wise (Matt. 10. 16), while at the same time aggressively hostile (Ps. 91. 13; Matthew 7. 10; Luke 11. 11-12). The snake is compared with, or referred to directly as, the devil (Solomon. 2. 243; Enoch 69. 6; Job 2. 1; Zechariah 3. 1 - 2) in the Old Testament by Moses (Gen. 3. 1) and even in the New Testament by Jesus (Matt 4. 10). While Plato had already described how in the golden age men and beasts spoke the same language and did not eat each other<sup>6</sup> Saint Paul is keen to associate the cunning of the snake with the slippage of meaning in language, further implicating the snake in the doctrine of the fall from Eden by equating its split tongue with the bifurcation of speech: '*Timeo autem ne sicut serpens Hevam seduxit astutia sua, ita corrumpantur sensus vestri, et excidant a simplicitate quae est in Christo*' [But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *The Statesman* 271 E, in *The Sophist and The Statesman*, trans. by A. E. Taylor (London: Nelson, 1961).

deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ] (2 Cor. 11. 3). The snake is an apt example of the way that biblical metaphors controlled Christianity's reading of animal types, though the essential meaning of animals - and of the snake in particular - is particularly difficult to locate. This inability to say that a snake stands definitively for one single trait or attribute in scripture is due to the type of slippage that we might expect from generalised descriptive similes, which depend upon the metamorphic qualities of the animal, and the comparisons drawn with Men. The various symbolic values of scriptural animals maintain similar currency in fictional contexts, and in turn dictate western attitudes to the real animal – especially those kept or produced for food. While dogs, along with poisoners, fornicators and murders are excluded from heaven (Rev. 22. 15) and are like beggars (Luke 16. 21) eating scraps from tables (Matt. 15. 26 - 7; Mark 7. 27 - 28) they are likened to pigs who consume anything (Luke 15. 15 - 16; Lev. 11. 7; Isa. 65. 4, 66. 3, 65. 17). In turn pigs are seen as impure, and an apposite vehicle for demons; Jesus drives unclean spirits from the possessed demonic into pigs, who leap from a cliff and drown in the sea of Galilee, apparently deserving their fate because of their unclean nature: *'exierunt ergo daemonia ab homine, et intraverunt in porcos; et impetu abiit grex per praeceptum in stagnum, et suffocatus est'* [Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place and into the lake and drowned] (Luke 8. 33; cf., Mark 5. 1 - 20; 2 Peter 2. 22). Hebrew dietary laws which forbade the consumption of pork have little effect on the Christian attitude to its consumption, and despite attempts to justify such eating habits, the practice becomes acceptable at the time of the mergence of Christianity with Rome.<sup>7</sup> Pigs are also lustful animals, often being compared to women: *'circulus aureus in naribus suis mulier pulchra et fatua'* [As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion] (Prov. 11. 22). Like the snake, the diversity of scriptural metaphors and exegesis on animals such as the pig also provides unstable analogies and metaphors – they may be a symbol for one thing at one moment, and another the next. These instabilities, which are often contradictory, can be seen in the range of meaning bestowed upon the animal in the literary text. But

<sup>7</sup> Various attempts to justify or discredit dietary laws by Christian authorities are cited by Robert M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 13 - 14.

medieval literary texts also tackle such truisms about the animal by a literary expression, which has the capacity to release and discuss that which has already been enclosed. This thesis will demonstrate how questions about the status of the animal which are enclosed in authorised texts, are exorcised in fiction.

In his book *The Status of Animals* C. W. Hume made a statement suggesting that our reading of the animal needs to be more comprehensive:

It seems to me that if we are to achieve what Locke called “bottoming” [*Conduct of the Understanding* § 44] we must see our subject against a wider background. A mistaken supposition as to the way in which knowledge is got has led to a wrong outlook of which a wrong view of the status of animals is only one aspect.<sup>8</sup>

Christian thought sits uncomfortably with the idea that the animal is more significant than it is given credit for, and the plethora of medieval texts which use the animal or explore the idea of man as animal bear testament to an underlying concern with a significance over and above doctrinal interpretations, which may indeed be based upon ‘mistaken supposition’. Medieval literature cannot be understood apart from the New Testament context and the early Christian Church. This statement, of necessity, must also be reversed. The early church *seems* incomprehensible unless one reads the New Testament through medieval literature to understand the exegesis through which it has passed. ‘Pagan’ source material as well as scripture was all subject to the interpretation of Augustine, Aquinas and others. I have set out to show that the way we think of the medieval mind, and understand its view of scripture, sounds suspiciously like the interpretation of two men, namely Augustine and Aquinas. Subsequently, their interpretations and compilations can be seen to constitute a discourse of exclusion. Significantly, Augustine and Aquinas frequently refer to the

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<sup>8</sup> C. W. Hume, *The Status of animals in the Christian Religion* (London: The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, 1957) p. v.

biblical dominion of Genesis to justify man's use and abuse of the animal,<sup>9</sup> arguing that all created things are made for the benefit of man. This hierarchy extends to the realm of the intellect, and Aquinas argues that using animals includes seeing them as signs: 'in the course of nature the intellectual substance uses all others for its own sake ... for the perfection of the intellect, which sees the truth in them as in a mirror.'<sup>10</sup> These theological attitudes take their authority from what is understood to be the absolute and unchanging scriptural word of God. However, an analysis of the word of God which apparently validates a legitimate dominion or *material use* can be seen to be extremely tenuous, pragmatic, and interpretative. The problem is first pointed out by the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry, who asks why the creator made such a plethora of animals which produce abhorrent reactions in man, who is himself an animal often likened to such beasts. Seeing the animal in terms of divine providence, as Porphyry observes, presents a problem for Christian exegesis. How can everything which is produced in, and generated by nature, be solely to the final end of the benefit of man:

The hog, however [says Chrysippus, his opponent] was produced by nature for the purpose of being slaughtered and used for food; and when it suffers this, it obtains the end for which it was adapted, and is benefited. But if God fashioned animals for the use of men, in what do we use flies, lice, bats, beetles, scorpions, and vipers? of which some are odious to the sight, defile the touch, are intolerant to the smell, and in their voice dire and unpleasant; and others, on the contrary, are destructive to those who meet them.<sup>11</sup>

Porphyry makes a perfectly valid point, not merely about the consumption of the animal, but about the spurious justifications for the consumption of a limited number of animals by questioning the notion that all animals are made to such an end. If

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<sup>9</sup> DCD XI. 27; cf., *Summa Theologiae*, cura et studio Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis S. pii Pp. V issu confectum recognita, 5 vols., (Ottawa: 1941 - 1945) I Q 96 1; I Q 96 2; I Q 64 1; I Q 65 3. Hereafter referred to as *ST*.

<sup>10</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, cited by Clark. P. A. B. & Andrew Linzey, eds., *Political Theory and Animal Rights* (London: Pluto Press, 1990) p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, trans. by Thomas Taylor, ed. by E. Wynne -Tyson (London: Centaur Press Ltd., 1965) 3. 21, pp. 129 - 130.

providential design is the precedent, how do we understand the role of the ‘abhorrent’? In this respect the idea of dominion can itself be seen as interpretative and it is difficult to accept as anything other than a self-interested exposition of the supposed dominion over animals which preoccupies Thomistic thought. Aquinas’ interpretations of man’s place in the corporeal context, as well as the King James translation of The Bible, propound the notion that the divine scheme is one in which man should have ‘dominion’ over the animal, and provide the basis for the theological debate about the status of the animal up to the present time. The Vulgate, however, does not transmit this same sense: ‘*Et ait: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram; et praesit piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli, et bestiis universaeque terrae, omni re reptili quod movetur in terra*’ (Genesis 1. 26). The verb *praesit* denotes guardianship and responsibility for creation. There is no mention of *imperium*, or *regnum*, or the *dominatus* or implied dominion of the King James Version.<sup>12</sup> Other sources suggest different understandings. Aquinas’ use of the word *praesit* when explaining that Genesis gives ‘dominion’ to man over all things, is also qualified by the microcosm / macrocosm correspondence which he is explaining in order to illustrate that all things are in a sense contained within man, and it is over these things that he has the only absolute authority.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the number of references to scriptural covenants, which confound the idea of a humanocentric dominion, is immense, and it is central to my argument that though testaments, gospels and injunctions litter Christian scripture, they are ignored, or repressed, or misrepresented. ‘*Aperi os tuum muto, et causis omnium filium qui pertranseunt*’, open your mouth for the dumb, for all who are appointed to destruction, says the Proverb

<sup>12</sup> There is a much debated dichotomy between the literal sense of the text and subsequent interpretations. While Andrew Linzey does not offer a translation he is keen to stress a New Testament, Christological interpretation: ‘If it is true that the power of God is most authentically expressed in the form of suffering service then we have to ask ourselves radical questions about how we are to understand our own lordship or dominion over nature in general and animals in particular.’ Andrew Linzey, *Animal theology* (London: SMC Press Ltd., 1994) p. 54. In the most recent appraisal of Christology Christopher Tuckett states that ‘the assertion that Jesus was in the form of God may be paralleled by the statement that Adam was made in the image [Gk. *eikon*] of God (Gen. 1: 26). Jesus is then said to have not regarded equality with God to be *harpagmos* (NRSV ‘something to be exploited’).’ Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) p. 54. further still Thomas Torrance argues that man should play a redemptive role in his relationship with nature, bringing order where disharmony threatens with disorder, see Thomas Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) pp. 129 - 130.

<sup>13</sup> I explain this at length below 2. 8, and specifically in relation to Henryson’s fables below 3. 4 (e).

(31. 8). ‘*iustitia tua quasi montes Domine iudicium tuum abyssus multa homines et iumenta salvos facies Domine*’ (Psalm 35:7 in Vulgate cycle, 36.6 in translation) explains that God brings salvation to man and animal alike. God remembers the covenant which is between Himself and man and every living creature of all flesh not to bring further retribution after the flood: ‘*et recodabor foederis mei vobiscum, et cum omni anima vivente quae carnem vegetat*’ (Gen: 9. 15). God importantly promises a covenant with animals: ‘*Et percutiam cum eis foedus in die illa, cum bestia agri et cum volucre caeli et cum reptili terrae; et arcum et gladium et bellum conteram de terra, et dormire eos faciam fiducialiter*’; his promise is to the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground to abolish slaughter, bring safety, and betroth them to Him forever (Hos. 2. 18). There are no demands or condemnations in these lines, but when considered they can be seen to modify and challenge doctrine to the point that discounting the animal as morally insignificant is incompatible with Christian scriptural principles. The problems of translation and interpretation highlight that there is clearly no single or absolute reading. But such problems present the end of a thread of an argument which I will explore in this thesis: that the real significance of God’s covenant and relationship with the animal has been either actively dismissed in the interests of promoting human interests, or is merely overlooked as irrelevant to Christian thought, and presents problems for literary texts.

The absence of reference to ‘covenant’ scripture in official discourses and texts suggests a selective approach to the understanding of the animal which is also inherently political, evident in the predilection for hierarchising structures, and the all too convenient allegory imposed on textual material which resists such allegorical treatments. A general trend may be observed in the apparent displacement of the animal to the bottom of a hierarchised structure in Bartholomaeus Anglicus *De proprietatibus rerum*.<sup>14</sup> There are, however, particular examples of discrepancies in bestiaries where Aristotle is transparently rewritten in the terms of contemporary

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<sup>14</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things a Critical Text: John Trevisa’s translation of De proprietatibus rerum of Bartholomaeus Anglicus*, 2 Vol. ed. by M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter *DPR*. For a discussion on the ‘Aristotelian’ placement of the animal in the text see appendix A.

Christian ideals. Francis Klingender has drawn attention to such an instance in the *DPR*,<sup>15</sup> which illustrates how medieval custom and convention is mirrored in a socially feudal world of anthropomorphised bees:

Been Makeþ amonge hem a kyng and ordeyneþ among hem common people. ... [þey] defendeth hym wiþ ful greet diffens and holdeþ feire and worschipe to perische and be ispilt for here kyng ... but been that beþ vnboxom to þe kyng woundip hemselfe by here owne doom and dampnacioune for to dye by the wounde of here owne stenge.<sup>16</sup>

Bees work and defend a king who does not leave the hive, in a model of servitude and accepted serfdom to an absolute monarch who is God-like at its top. The king is ordained, his subjects want nothing more than to die for him, and any subject who is treacherous stings itself to death. But Bartholomaeus' account, which is taken from the translator Avicenna's relation of Aristotle, describes the hive's descending or hierarchical version of authority, where action can only result from permission or commission from above.<sup>17</sup> This is clearly not just a translation but an ideologically dictated appropriation of Aristotle's thought into a medieval version of world order. The difference between Aristotle's description and that of Avicenna, can be seen in the contrast between Avicenna's hierarchy and Aristotle's lateral or *associative* vision of the hive, where actions are based on the freely chosen activity of a collective, and where bees 'readily kill the majority of their leaders ... so that there should not be a multiplicity of them to disperse the swarm.'<sup>18</sup> Aristotle observes:

When a swarm is about to take flight, a monotonous and peculiar hum is made for some days ... a few bees fly around the hive. Whether the king is

<sup>15</sup> Klingender, Francis, *Animals in Art and Thought: to the End of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Evelyn Antal & John Havthan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) p. 356.

<sup>16</sup> *DPR* 12. 20 & 18. 12 *verbatim*.

<sup>17</sup> Avicenna, or Ḥusain ibn sina (980 – 1036 A.D.) was an Arab physician, translator and commentator, and is an authority cited throughout the *DPR*.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, Loeb Parallel Editions Series Trans., A. L. Peck (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1965) 625 a, 10-25.



among these has not yet been observed ... if a king who they have abandoned accompanies them they destroy him.<sup>19</sup>

As Klingender points out, far from assuming or imposing the idea that the structure of the domain is patriarchal, Aristotle records a suspicion based on observation which Bartholomaeus' account neglects: 'some people call them "mothers," implying that they produce the young.'<sup>20</sup> Where Aristotle avoids comparison with human society, Bartholomaeus' unquestioning *compilatio*, which draws on the authoritative translations of Isidore of Seville, Avicenna and Michael Scott, moves the mode from literal observation to a political and social allegory based within a Christian hierarchy. Reporting his authorities as though they are literal translations of Aristotle, Bartholomaeus may be unaware of this 'built-in' political allegoresis of the social organisation of the hive. Such a comparison reveals an instance where the scholastic use of textual animal analogues is far from discriminating, and produces an account of an apparently natural structure which seems to justify feudal hierarchy. In the process, Aristotle's observations are used to redefine the animal in terms of Christian thought, the anthropomorphised textual world of the bees apparently rehearsing the human pattern of idealised social relations which has been imposed upon them.

Augustine's hand is very much in evidence in medieval literature and theological attitudes to the animal, though his statements were often made in relation to other issues. Gillian Clark points out that Augustine never 'engaged in sustained theological argument about the nature of animals and their relationship to God and to humans. He made assertions about animals [in the context of] quite different questions.'<sup>21</sup> My use of Augustine in this thesis is based predominantly upon his sign theory, in which context literal things and literal words are fallen and 'carnal'. Literal understandings, for Augustine, are seen as bestial because like the fallen world their word no longer

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<sup>19</sup> *Hist* 625 b, 5 - 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Hist* 553 b, 10 - 25.

<sup>21</sup> Gillian Clark, 'The Fathers and the Animals: The Rule of Reason?' in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions About Animals For Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Andrew Linzey & Dorothy Yamamoto (Oxford: SCM Press Ltd, 1998) p. 67.

contains meaning. But Augustine seems to enforce the notion of the contingency of all language - scripture included - when he responds to the dualistic Manichean belief that the divine was fragmented and dispersed into creation and should not be consumed. Giving a disingenuous justification for meat eating in relation to man's dominion, Augustine's explanation of the seventh commandment becomes quite literally aporetic, its sense being confused. Yet it is an influential analogue to the Christian understanding of human dominance. He states that the biblical injunction not to kill, '*Non occides*' (Ex. 20. 13) is to be understood as homicidal murder. Construing ' "Do not kill" as applying to human beings, that is, other persons and oneself. For to kill oneself is to kill a human being',<sup>22</sup> is a puzzling and undecidable attempt to evade an unequivocal statement. God's comprehensive injunction is, without justification, shifted to the realm of man alone and the explicit demand is taken *verbum sapienti*, as though by its nature the command expresses a need for a further, more explicit statement or qualification. Augustine in fact, compromises the idea that the Word is unchanging and absolute, by coercing it into the contingent field of interpretation and elucidation. In this instance, interpretation has produced a selective doctrine presenting a fragmentary understanding of a large body of work, equivocating on the unequivocal, and constituting a limited reflection of ontological reality. God's Truth, apparent in his commands, is compromised by Augustine's commentary.

Gillian Clark asks why man's dominion is so obvious to a reader like Augustine? She follows Augustine's validation for the consumption of meat when he addresses the Manicheans, insisting that the eating of meat is authorised by scripture. Yet he feels he has to go further and justify it philosophically. He draws attention to the irrationality of animals: they are not like us because they lack reason, he says, concluding that reason has not been given to animals to have in common with man.<sup>23</sup> Augustine makes three assumptions, that animals are inferior because we can tame them and not them us; that humans are distinctively rational animals and that reason

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<sup>22</sup> Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, Penguin Classics Series (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 1. 20, pp. 31 - 32.

<sup>23</sup> Clark *op cit.*, pp. 67 - 73.

rules over non – reason; and that ‘reason’ means the intellectual capacity placing human beings next to - or indeed like - God, both intellectually and spiritually.<sup>24</sup> Augustine enforces it with a lexicon of negative animal terminology, which though meant to reveal divine intentions, is entirely textual and rhetorical. Augustine uses *bestia*, insinuating the aggressive ferocity of the animal, and *belua*, connoting its monstrosity. He does not use *animalia* (a living creature) which includes human beings, but *pecus*, or cattle, to emphasis the utility of the animal.<sup>25</sup> While other figures advised against the consumption of the animal, they are less influential than Augustine, whose rhetorical expressions assume and enforce human superiority over God’s creation and influence the formation of Christian thought. Clement of Alexandria dealt with diet from points of view both moral and philosophical. He quoted Paul as saying, ‘It is good not to eat meat or drink wine’ which is shortened from Romans 14. 21, to emphasise his Pythagorean agenda. He cites the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus: ‘Meat, though appropriate for wild animals, darkens the soul.’<sup>26</sup> Needless to say, such a position did not influence the way that early Christianity defined the animal.

Philosophical and scriptural texts present a discourse preoccupied with the identification and attainment of a system of reading creation. However, they are involved not in reflecting creation, but in *informing* an audience of what creation might be and prescribing a system for reading its signs. Middle English texts operate within a similarly well - established system and are concerned with the representation of established ideas. Their modes of producing alternative realities aim to reflect

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<sup>24</sup> This is an essentially Aristotelian understanding: ‘the lower animals have no share in happiness, being completely incapable of such activity. The life of the gods is altogether happy, and that of man insofar as it contains something that resembles the divine activity; but none of the lower animals is happy, because they have no way of participating in contemplation.’ Aristotle, *Ethics*, in *The ethics of Aristotle: the Nicomachean ethics*, trans. by J. A. K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955) 10, 1178 b.

<sup>25</sup> Clark *op cit.*, p. 68, citing 83 *Questions on Various Topics* (*Corpus Christianorum, series Latina*) 44A: 20. Isidore of Seville’s later *etymological explicatio* is that ‘ “We call *pecus* everything that lacks human voice and appearance.” Properly the name *pecus* is used of those animals fit for eating, such as sheep and pigs; or useful to mankind, such as horses and oxen. There is a difference between *pecora* and *pecudes*, for “the ancients commonly called all animals *pecora*,” but *pecudes* only those animals that are eaten, as if *pecu-edes*. But in general every animal is called *pecus* from feeding (*pascendo*)’ . Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 12. 1, 5, cited in English translation by Grant 1999 *op cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Tutor* 2. 11. 1. cited in English translation by Grant 1999 *ibid.*, p. 47.

creation and facilitate allegorical readings. Medieval justifications for the value of a text can be complex. However apparently trivial the text or tale, says Chaucer in his 'retraction', there is probably a message of some importance. He defers to the authority of scripture, saying that all that is written may be read as doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

Amongst other texts 'al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine' appears in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, being a common modesty topos or *excusatio*. Helen Cooper observes that though Paul meant it to apply to scripture, by the later Middle Ages it was 'applied as the justification for the study of pagan authors in order to extract the moral kernel - by allegorisation if necessary.'<sup>28</sup> This statement suggests that if the required understanding is not evident in a text, allegorisation establishes a meaning which was not necessarily there, in order to lead or educate an audience to what it should think. In the process pagan authorities are selectively tailored to the canon of Christian doctrine to the advancement of Christian ideology. In this process, relevant positions are actively excluded from Christian thought.<sup>29</sup>

In order to demonstrate the presence and exclusion of alternative positions, and to reveal shifting perspectives on the animal, this thesis begins historically with Porphyry's treatise *On Abstinence from Animal Food* written in the third century after the death of Christ. Subsequently, the argument progresses to the twelfth century and early scholastic attitudes to animals in the literal sense. While this would seem to be a large temporal jump in the development of any argument it serves the purpose of illustrating the type of Hellenic thought which is synthesised into Christian theory, and the elements that are excluded. But there is also an important contrast between the two, characterised on the one hand by the outward looking paradigm of Porphyry's launch points to the realm of mind, and on the other hand Bartholomaeus Anglicus' encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum* which offers a closed matrix of interpretative thought. In works such as the *DPR*, the book of creation is read through a fideistically enclosed meaning system. Augustine took to heart and amplified the scriptural

<sup>27</sup> Citing 2 Tim. 3. 16; Rom. 6. 17; 1 Cor. 12. 1 - 11.

<sup>28</sup> Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. 1983) p. 240.

<sup>29</sup> The most comprehensive discussion on the synthesis of Hellenic philosophy which Christian theology is given by Etienne Gilson, in *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955) esp. pp. 9 - 24.

injunction that unless you have faith you will never have understanding: ‘*si non credideritis, non permanebitis*’ (Isaiah 7.9). When Etienne Gilson states that ‘Faith, properly speaking, is in the human intellect, but must in a way reside also in things, albeit in things as related to the divine intellect’<sup>30</sup> he highlights an approach to knowledge first enunciated by Augustine in *De magistro*, where understanding will only be gifted if the enquirer has faith in God before he approach knowledge. Paradoxically, the required pre-existent faith strongly suggests the pre-determined answers supplied by Christian doctrine, which would in turn seem to dismiss the importance of the animal, and marks the interpretative differences between Hellenic and scholastic thought.

Porphyry stands geographically between East and West, ‘a Greek speaker who lived for a good part of his life at or near Rome.’<sup>31</sup> He was born in AD 232 or 233. in Tyria, Phoenicia and died at Rome in 305. Originally called Malchus, meaning ‘King’, he was persuaded to take the equivalent Greek name Basileus by his tutor, the grammarian Longinus (c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century.), while at Athens. Around AD 260, in anticipation of his move to Rome, he was encouraged to take a further derivative of his original name and changed it to Porphyry after the purple dye used for imperial garments. At the age of thirty he went to Rome, met the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus, and ‘giving up all his former teachers, he devoted himself entirely to this great master of his philosophy.’<sup>32</sup> After Plotinus’ death, Porphyry became the major living representative of Neoplatonism in the later third century. Much of Porphyry’s work has been destroyed. Existing pieces of his work include his edited collection and commentary of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, or “Nines”, so-called because they were sorted into chapters of nine sections each by Porphyry; *Vita Plotini* (the life of Plotinus), *De Abstinencia* (*The Abstinences*), the *Eisagōgē* or ‘introduction’ to Aristotle’s categories, *Kata Christianōn* (*Against the Christians*), *The Life of Pythagoras*, *History Of Philosophy*, *De regressu animae* (*Return of the Soul*) and the allegorical

<sup>30</sup> Gilson, Etienne, *The Spirit Of Medieval Philosophy: Gifford Lectures, 1931 - 1932*. Trans. by A. H. C. Downs (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) p. 238.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, A., *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study In Post-Plotinic Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.) p. XV.

<sup>32</sup> Wynne – Tyson *op cit.*, p. 5.

interpretation of the cave in the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey* as a microcosm of the cosmos, *De antro nymphanum* (*Cave of the Nymphs*). His *Letters to his Wife Marcella*, proffers guidance and suggestions for life's spiritual journey. *On Cult Images* demonstrates the allegorical approach followed by many philosophers and writers including the Stoics, Plutarch, Philo of Alexandria, and the Neoplatonists. There is no doubt that Porphyry is important. Augustine refers to him as 'the noble philosopher', 'the great ethnic philosopher' and ranks him above Plato. Wynne – Tyson comments that 'Eusebius, his implacable enemy, speaks of Porphyry as "the wonderful theologian" and "the great prophet."' To Simplicius he was "the most learned of philosophers." <sup>33</sup> The use of Porphyry's *On Abstinence* in this thesis serves to highlight the manner of his exclusion. Because of his attack on Christianity, directed against the Christians of his own day, and the subsequent burning of *Against the Christians*, he seems to stand out as the representative of a diametrically opposed position: an opposing Hellenic voice of dissent to Christian ideology. Yet the terminology of his *Eisagōgē*, or 'introduction' to Aristotle's categories fixed much of the vocabulary for subsequent mediaeval discussions, and contains some of the most significant lines in the history of Philosophy. Porphyry would come to be seen, initially by Augustine, as a pagan in possession of Christian truth, and profoundly important to Christian thought.

However, it is because Porphyry's work has so much in common with Christianity, although initially excluded from being one of its authorities, that he is of interest. When he is finally accepted as a legitimate philosophical voice, and an appropriate philosopher who complements Christian thought, his most complete and comprehensive work, *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, is not integrated into western thought with other of his works. It is this factor more than any other, which characterises a discursive pattern for the exclusion of animals from moral consideration in the Christian paradigm. This thesis begins its analysis at the time of early Christianity and Christian canon formation, where patterns of exclusion are most vividly and textually evident, and which can be seen to influence the way that

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<sup>33</sup> Wynne – Tyson *ibid.*, p. 5.

animals, as an obvious method of Christian debate, are understood in Middle English texts. Questions apparently satisfactorily resolved by Porphyry about animal status in creation, constantly threaten to erupt into medieval narratives and question their integrity or test the ideas of the theology of the animal. In addition, it is upon these narratives that my argument will find its main point of focus.

In many respects Porphyry's mode of thought bears striking similarity to Christian Philosophy. Augustine discovered in Porphyry's work a divine transcendence and a concept of the trinity in Neoplatonism, as St. Ambrose's parallelism did in adapting Neoplatonism to Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Porphyry's translation of Plotinus' second *Ennead* attacks the current 'Gnostic' Christian apocalyptic hopes, by propounding a non-dualistic definition of creation, which sounds remarkably similar to that which we know as a Christian understanding of the universe:

the universe is a life organised, effective, complex, all –comprehensive, displaying an unfathomable wisdom. How then can anyone [viz., the “Gnostics”] deny that it is a clear image, beautifully formed, of the intellectual Divinities? No doubt it is a copy, not original; but that is its very nature; it cannot be at once a symbol and reality. But to say that it is an inadequate copy is false. Nothing has been left out which a beautiful representation within the physical order could include.<sup>35</sup>

This focus on the world as a 'copy' demonstrates a central tenet of the perennial philosophy that earthly life does not constitute the whole of reality.<sup>36</sup> Everything in the mundane world has its more powerful positive original in a divine realm.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For a basic though thorough account of Ambrose's Neoplatonism see *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* ed. by McGraw & Hill (The Catholic University Of America, 1966) Vol. 2. p. 1043 b., hereafter referred to as *NCE*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ennead* 2, 9. 8. references to Porphyry's edited version of his master Plotinus' *Enneads* are taken from *The Enneads*, trans. by S. Mackenna (Harmondsworth: Penguin Ltd., 1991).

<sup>36</sup> The term 'perennial philosophy' is used in the context of Hellenic questions about man's place in the cosmos, which was common at all cultures and applied to the enquiry of a range of subjects which could be called 'philosophy', providing it was guided by a canon of rationality.

<sup>37</sup> That it could not at once be a symbol *and* reality would have been contested by medieval philosophers, who would have refined their categories to an either, or dependent upon, solution in line with the problem to be addressed.

Aquinas expresses the same thing in a different paradigm, seeing a non-dualistic creation inseparable from God and inseparably good. He interprets creation in the literary mode which we might call pedagogical literary criticism. Based on Aristotle and Genesis, interpretation progresses from an empirical philosophy at the literal level of the text, to the anagogical. In other words, assisted by a Hellenic logic which is difficult for him to deny, his hermeneutic reveals the hidden mystical and spiritual meaning of The Bible, and what this means in terms of the greater concerns of death, judgement and salvation. At each level there is a quidditative approach which asks and examines what *essence* makes a thing what it is. In this example, all levels of creation are infused with God's essence. To prove his point Aquinas arrives, tropologically, at the scriptural authority upon which figurative interpretation depends. It also concludes the progress of his logic by a justification which places his discourse in the sequential ordering of the bible itself. In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas explains that matter is formless and adaptable to any form, and that God planned to create many distinct things so that he could share with them, and they reproduce, his goodness. Because no single creature could do this, he produced diverse numbers of creatures so that what was lacking in one expression of his goodness would be made up by another: God is revealed in his diversity. Aquinas explains that, to rule out the idea that things [*rerum*] came from competing sources of good and evil, Origen (c.185 - c.254)<sup>38</sup> suggested that in the beginning God created all creatures equal and with reason, but that inequality arose from free choice:

*Illae igitur rationales creaturae quae ad Deum per liberum arbitrium  
conversae sunt promotae sunt ad diversos ordines angelorum pro  
diversitate meritorum. Illae autem quae aversae sunt a deo, sunt  
corporibus alligatae diversis, secundum diversitatem peccati, et hanc  
causam dicit esse creationis et diversitatis corporum.*

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<sup>38</sup> Origen (c.185 - c.254) represents the Alexandrian school of theology, was well known for his allegorical reading of scripture, and in particular for his use of Platonism in such readings. Perhaps Aquinas assumes that Origen is well-known as he does not state the location of his authority, though it is clearly Origen's development of the idea that necessary evil leads to the fulfilment of God's purpose, *Homilia in Numeros*, XIV, 2; in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 12. 677D – 678A; 678C – 679A., cited in English translation by Alister E. McGrath, ed. *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 3. 6 p. 96.



*Sed secundum hoc, universitas corporalium creaturum non esset propter bonitatem Dei communicandem creaturis, sed ad puniendum peccatum. Quod est contra illud quod dicitur Gen. 1<sup>31</sup> : "Vidit Deus cuncta quae fecerat, et errant valde bona."*<sup>39</sup>

All things being equal man's purpose must have been to care for creation.

Those turning to God, Aquinas explains, were promoted to the ranks of angels as they deserve, but those turning away were confined in different material bodies according to the extent of their fault. Were this true the bodily universe would have been created as a punishment for sin, which contradicts Genesis: *God saw all the things that he had made and they were very good.*

How can two such similar understandings of creation, the Neoplatonic and the early Christian, differ so insolubly on the treatment of that creation? In part the answer lies in the way creation is interpreted, in fact, from the perspective of the first mysterious premise of Christian hermeneutics: in the beginning was the word and the word was God. We can either accept Augustine's interpretation of scripture itself as absolute, or we can see both as arbitrary productions which are ideologically predisposed to the maintenance of hierarchies of dominance and subservience. Because man has *logos*, he can make sense of the world and express it in words. Because animals do not use words it is assumed they have incomplete *logoi* though in Aristotle's thought they do have a soul [Gk. *psuchê*, Latin, *anima*]. Again interpretation depends on the translated term *zôa*: living beings without *logos*, or in the medieval paradigm commonly 'irrational creatures.'<sup>40</sup>

The order of creation is what Porphyry calls God's masterwork of precision: 'And since all that exists is as it is by virtue of the divine ordinance, it is impossible that the order of creation can be other than what it is; no better order can be conceived for it.'<sup>41</sup> We may ask, what contribution does Porphyry make to the formation of the

<sup>39</sup> *ST I Q 47, 2, ad 1.*

<sup>40</sup> Clark *op cit.*, p 77.

<sup>41</sup> Porphyry, *Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*, ed. and trans. by R. J. Hoffmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 74.

Christian paradigm? The most available answer, that he has nothing at all to do with it, suggests a problem extending to the medieval understanding of God's creation. One of the reasons for this is that Porphyry's work was largely removed from sight, thereby censoring it from transmission and development in the future. Another is that his work, the most sophisticated evolution of Neoplatonism in its pre-Christian form, had to compete with the newly realised Christian paradigm which had the power of Constantine and his empire as its benefactor. Porphyry produces a vast amount of material in the fourth century after the death of Christ. Yet, *On Abstinence from Animal Food* has had no recognition or ensuing hermeneutic. While many of his works were well known during his life time, the burning of Porphyry's *Against the Christians* by Constantine and the banning of all other of his works as contra-distinct to Christian faith inevitably censored his thought from appreciation. It is only when Augustine is influenced by Porphyry, seeing him as a pagan philosopher in possession of Christian truth, that Porphyry is subsequently rationalised into the church. His work *becomes* acceptable; but this is contingent upon limited inclusions of his work in Christian philosophical thought. The revival of his work was a selective process occluding his largest and most complete text, *On Abstinence*.

To analyse a consistent body of textual examples of the exclusion and inclusion, displacement and placement of animals offers an illuminating historiographical corrective, exploring the notion that political power, manifested in the church at its beginnings, is a necessarily exclusionary discourse. Others would disagree.<sup>42</sup> There will be other cogent explanations.<sup>43</sup> But an incisive pathology of textual material

<sup>42</sup> Harold Bloom asserts that 'The Western Canon, despite the limitless idealism of those who would open it up, exists precisely in order to impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral.' He calls those who might question the Canon or see it as ideologically constructed, as 'resenters of the aesthetic value of literature' but then he never says what and why that resentment might be of. H. Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and the School of the Ages* (1994: Macmillan, 1995) pp. 35 and 518. Alternatively, an absolute / contingent distinction could be made between seeing a) the canon as closed, or in Medieval terms, b) seeing the canon as a guiding principle which defines high, middle and low styles according to the contingencies of style, mode, genre and subject matter to be addressed.

<sup>43</sup> Bloom denies that there is an ideology behind canon formation, while Foucault observes that power is comprised of instruments for the formation of recording knowledge (registers and archives), methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation, apparatus of control and so forth. An aspect of Foucault's critical method is that it locates power outside the conscious or intentional decision. He does not ask: who is in power? He asks how power installs *itself* and produces real material effects; where one such effect might be a *particular kind of subject who will in turn act as*

revealing the consistent manifestation of these examples in Middle English literature, will enunciate a voice for those not recognised by Christian theology and medieval doctrine.

Turning animals into texts has a long history. This very fact alone reveals, on the level of personal experience, a desire to connect with 'nature' and its inhabitants.

Specifically, the entanglements of personality, reason, experience and the divine are measured in the most basic denominator, the material conditions we share with animals. The use of fable forms afford personal participation and engagement with moral questions. In this sense, animals are morally neutral entities to which we may tailor our own measurements. The question is: how do we read this use? The study of pre - Renaissance literature and its theory, is somewhat misleadingly termed 'medieval' for the convenience of classification. In reality, there is a constant process of development over several hundred years. Correspondingly, the use of animals as a symbolic device in literary debate is rarely treated in the same way by different authors at different periods of time.

Medieval theory of authorship was not homogenous in the sense of being uncomplicated and narrowly monolithic; there was a rich abundance of kinds, degrees, properties and aspects of authorship to describe and relate to not one but several systems of classification.

Neither was the theory static: it is best defined in terms of basic literary assumption, approaches and methods of analysis which altered, sometimes considerably, over the centuries and were applied to many types of writing for many different purposes.<sup>44</sup>

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*a channel for the flow of power itself.* Foucault does not look to the 'authors' of power but to the field of power.' [my italics]. Bloom states 'I myself would want to argue ... that aesthetic choice has always guided every secular aspect of canon formation, but that is a difficult argument to maintain at this time when the defence of the literary canon, like the assault against it, had become so heavily politicised. Ideological defences of the Western Canon are as pernicious in regard to aesthetic values as the onslaughts of attackers who seek to destroy the Canon, or 'open it up', as they proclaim.' Bloom *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Latter Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1986) p. 2.

A valid common denominator, then, would seem to be the one thing that all my texts have in common - the commentary itself. The use of a body of Middle English texts, predominantly concerned with modes of exegesis, will demonstrate a consistent epistemology in the thesis, mediated by a strong tradition of hermeneutic explanation. Subsequently the collocation of source material and scholastic interpretative strategies with later works by writers such as Chaucer, Langland and Henryson, aims to demonstrate how boundaries of inclusion, marginalisation and exclusion are inherent in a system of thought which makes sense of the world by its enumeration and categorisation. At a practical level the application of this argument to a relatively narrow base of literary texts should be seen relative to the necessary analysis of theoretical material. The theory should be applicable to a large number of medieval texts, though in the interests of economy the thesis focuses upon a few. Indeed, while all texts become available to certain readings, some illustrate those readings more readily.

My 'exposure' of the conspicuous discrepancy between ideological aspiration and reality may not easily compete with established positions. Nevertheless, I am keen to observe that certain ideologies are essential to the continuance of a vested interest, and accordingly inform a readership of positions to be 'believed', but which have been set-up for them by apparent persuasions and conditions of plausibility based upon textual representations. This notable position is, of course, that mankind should believe that all this world was created for exploitation purely by the human species. It is duly - and soberly - observed that no theory is popular which opposes or contradicts man this 'right'. But since the result of this belief has brought the world to a condition of ecological unbalance and abuse, a historiographical corrective would be justified in observing hitherto marginalised readings and material, and in suggesting that the displacement and marginalisation of the animal from accepted norms is transparently a selfish one. It may also advocate the reasonable observations of Porphyry's text as an ethically important and aesthetically beautiful proposition for our own time.

## CHAPTER ONE

## PORPHYRY, PHILOSOPHY, AND PATTERNS OF EXCLUDING THE ANIMAL

*‘Aperi os tuum muto, et causis omnium filium qui pertranseunt’*

(Proverbs 31. 8)

**1. 1 Excluding the animal in early Christianity**

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault makes a statement about the way we may approach and reappraise received patterns of knowledge. He suggests that there is a moment when every original idea becomes a convention; the very process of interpreting such conventions in a text has at its centre a tension between the reader, and the authoritative truisms of established thought which that text contains. Our ability to question such established and approved thought depends upon our ability to ascertain, with the best feasible precision, the point of rupture between the apparently axiomatic, and the inquiring challenge of a contemporary perspective:

This intersection [the integration of the new idea from original to traditional] does not prevent it from always maintaining a bi-polar analysis of the old and new. An analysis that reinvests in the empirical element of history and in each of its stages, the problematic of the origin: in every œuvre, in every book, in the smallest text, the problem is to rediscover to point of rupture, to establish, with the greatest possible precision, the division between the implicit density of the already - said, a perhaps involuntary fidelity to acquired opinion, the

law of discursive fatalities, and the vivacity of creation, the leap into irreducible difference.<sup>45</sup>

The concerns enunciated in the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Animal Food* reveal such tensions, between the Neoplatonic ethics of abstinence from animal use and abuse, and early Christian attitudes toward the animal. *On Abstinence* presents far-reaching ethical implications for a reappraisal of the status of the animal in western thought, not merely in the philosophical position that it propounds, but in the very fact that it is excluded from consideration within medieval Christian philosophy and theology, and the scholastic literary tradition. The texts of my thesis, on one level at least, constitute a broad - ranging discourse. Porphyry contests Christian thought, and the Christian allegorical interpretations which displace the animal from spiritual and ethical inclusion in its theology. Equally, at the time of early Christianity Porphyry represents a censored voice who stands in opposition to the authority of the newly state-sponsored Christianity and its use of scripture to its own ends, typified by statements such as 'but what I wish, that must be the canon.'<sup>46</sup>

In the pre-Christian world the nature of the relationship of man to animal exercised the minds of scientists and philosophers. In her introduction to Thomas Taylor's translation of *On Abstinence* Esmé Wynne - Tyson points out that what was evident to much of Hellenic thought, became so to Western thought, though remains unacknowledged:

What was implicit in the ancient mysteries, as well as in the idealistic philosophy of the west, became explicit in the nineteenth century with the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Owing chiefly to the lethargy of the human mind which dislikes above all things to have to re-think its metaphysical position, Darwin's revival of the theory of evolution has done

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<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1972) p.142.

<sup>46</sup> Attributed to Constantius II at the church council of 355. cited by Charles Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason* (London: Heinemann, 2002) p. 181.

little or nothing to awaken mankind from that state of somnolence, or hypnosis, that Porphyry so well understood.<sup>47</sup>

The idea that man may question the way things appear, and in doing so awake to the Real from an illusory understanding of the world, is an important tenet of Neoplatonic thought. If man does not transcend the material world, he may be reborn into another life, potentially as a beast. However, it is important not to confuse Porphyry's concern about an animal ethic with any discussion or fear of the equally Neoplatonic preoccupation with metempsychosis, or a 'karmic' rebirth as an animal.<sup>48</sup> Rather, Porphyry regards a recognised kinship with animals as essential solely on the premise that they are endowed with life, having the same principles of life such as feelings, memory and industry, as human beings. The only exception, as far as Porphyry is concerned, is their lack of speech. He does use the idea of metempsychosis in his arguments but discusses it when elucidating on the *Enneads*, drawing heavily on Pythagoreanism.

Humanity is poised mid – way between gods and beasts and inclines now to the one order, now to the other; some men grow like to the divine, others to the brute, the greatest number stand neutral. ... When the life – principle leaves the body it is what it is, what it most intensely lived ... Those that have maintained the human level are men once more. Those that have lived wholly to becoming animals ... Those who in their pleasures ... have gone their way in torpid grossness become mere growing things, for only or mainly, the

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<sup>47</sup> Wynne - Tyson *op cit*, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Plato develops this idea in the *Phaedrus*, arguing that after death the soul may pass to realm of the ideas, which it may have done before, and which is why we may innately, or through the process of anamnesis or 'recollection' have knowledge of such virtue. Man is a fallen spirit; his aspiration should be to recover that memory of himself by means of philosophy, and see the truth which will free him from the chains of irrationality that bind him. Porphyry's Neoplatonic understanding of awaking is the same as Plato's, as expressed in *The Republic*, ed., by G. F. R. Ferrari, trans. by Tom Griffith, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Ideas Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 4. 581 b. Pythagoras, who provides the doctrine, is an important authority for Porphyry because the idea of rebirth into animal forms is a good reason for prohibiting their consumption. The importance of earthly, re-embodied immortality of the soul, common to Plato's thought (*Rep.* 10. 608 d – 612), together with the idea espoused in the *Phaedrus* that only awakening through philosophy may release the soul from the world and body at death, is important, though not absolutely central to Porphyry's line of argument.

vegetative principle was active in them, and such men have been busy be-treeing themselves.<sup>49</sup>

This Pythagorean doctrine is wholly incompatible with the doctrines of heaven and hell in orthodox Christian religion. Plato specifically condemned faith as a means of finding truth and the Real, and his influence is clear in Plotinus' stressing of the importance of reason as a means to salvation. The Neoplatonic position does not see the same binarily opposed factions, rather understanding that reality is a continuum which expands outwards from a central source of power, the One or *Nous*, determining what is derived from it. This is not a temporal process, but metaphysically independent of time, though the lowest degree of reality and power is found in matter: 'which has no positive nature in itself, being only definable in negation. An individual can, as it were, reverse the process through [a direct] identification with the source of power, which Plotinus calls the One.'<sup>50</sup> The One may be attained separately from the realm of the material, though on these terms, is also to be sought primarily in the things which It created. For Christianity the binary opposites of good and bad are always in the balance, and the human soul may find its destination in either transcendent realm of heaven or hell, according to its actions and intentions during its time on earth. As will be demonstrated below there is an absolute / contingent distinction to be made here, as many commentators see that no evil can come from God's pure goodness: rather, evil may be explained as a turning away from God.<sup>51</sup> However, unlike the Neoplatonic idea that individual actions may lead to release from a cycle of death and rebirth, Christianity promotes the necessity of the doctrines of revelation through scripture, salvation through Christ, and illumination by God's Grace. Where there *is* a direct compatibility of Neoplatonism with Christian thought is the emphasis on the ethics of physical actions. Men should aspire to fulfil

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<sup>49</sup> *Emm* 3. 2. Based on the belief that animals have a soul, the vegetarian principle was certainly widespread. Robert Grant comments that 'such a vegetarian ideal was found among Orphics in the Graeco-Roman world. Plato, Eurpides, and Plutarch agree that the Orphic life included abstinence from animal food. Diogenes Laertius, Philostratus, and Iamblichus report that Pythagoreans too were vegetarians and give various explanations of their diet. Diogenes says they refused to kill or eat animals which, like us have souls, but that was only an excuse. Their real goal, he says, was to provide a healthy body and a keen mind.' Grant 1999 *op cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> D. W. Hamlyn, *The Penguin History of Western Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.) pp. 86 - 8.

<sup>51</sup> Discussed further See below 2. 6 & 3. 4 (b).



the potentially divine in themselves by the cessation of attachment to carnal thoughts and actions. The absolute, for Neoplatonism, is in everything, thereby suggesting not merely that there is a macrocosm - microcosm relationship between man, the cosmos, and the One its creator, but that this correspondence operates in the relationship between all created things, which should be treated appropriately and with equal consideration. The purification of the inward self in the corporeal or worldly context is of primary importance, therefore, for a philosophy which equates inscrutable purity in this world, with the next step in the evolutionary process, experiencing divinity in the realm of insensibles.

What Neoplatonism enforces in Christian thought is the idea that all things exist in a significant relation to the Prime Cause or creative energy from which they originate.<sup>52</sup> Where the animal is seen as a fallen utility in Christian thought, the very existence of the animal as a being, for Porphyry, must logically be seen as the primary reason for abstinence from the consumption, sacrifice, or indifference to animals. Man's affinity with his creator and his kinship with all forms of created existence must be understood as a spiritual affair in which he is involved. Correspondingly the sacrifice of an animal for the purpose of divining from its liver is an absurd empiricism for Porphyry because divination can only be motivated by a desire for material wealth. Porphyry's criticism of men who become philosophers in order to foresee the acquisition of the material, worldly things, places him in absolute ideological opposition to the sacrificial divination which he sees as the rehearsal of greed, and an anchor chaining men to the material. Rather, *On Abstinence* advocates the incubation of a pure life to the man who aspires in this life to liberate himself from the fetters of the corporeal world, and elevate his intellect and soul to the contemplation of truly existing Being, and to do so by a philosophical reason which divests the individual of

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<sup>52</sup> '... *et Spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas. Dixitque Deus: Fiat Lux. Et facta est lux.*' (Genesis 1. 2 - 3). The sure dispelling of darkness is the *essence* of all God's gifts. The wind which passes over waters is 'the spirit of God' translated from the Greek 'spiro' or 'I breath', in turn translated from the Hebrew Ruach, which appertains to the divine breath of God's agency in creation for both animals (Isa 34. 16) and man (Job 27. 3). Similarly the Greek λόγος or 'Logos' expresses the manifestation of God's word, signifying his act of material creation. λόγος is taken from the Hebrew word *Dabar* meaning *creative presence* or *essential creative energy*.

everything of the mortal nature which he assumes. He must depart from sense and imagination, and the irrationality which goes with them.

*On Abstinence* clearly exemplifies many ideas which contribute to Roman Christianity in its early stages, in particular the developed ontological hierarchies evident in Neoplatonic thought. However its main topic, that of the sanctity of all animal life and the necessity of abstaining from its consumption, is evidently *made* to be incompatible with organised Christian thought. Though it is not my intention to treat *On Abstinence* as a literary text, Porphyry's philosophical treatise demonstrates how a significant philosophical position is actively excluded from Christianity, despite the theoretically similar understandings on the status of creation.

## 1. 2 Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Animal Food*

The beginning of *On Abstinence* is characterised by the tension between Porphyry's Neoplatonic position and that of Christianity. It is addressed to a former disciple, Firmus, who became a Christian to recover his liberty to eat flesh and drink wine.<sup>53</sup> In book one, which addresses Firmus directly, a range of contemporary philosophical positions are discussed, including the Peripatetic, Stoic and Epicurean perspectives on the status of the animal in creation. Having argued that the consumption of animal flesh arouses the bodily passions and senses, while abstinence allows a persevering attention to the intelligibles of philosophy, Porphyry opposes Claudius the Neopolitan's treatise *Against Abstinence from Animal Food* by arguing that:

We should therefore abstain, no less than from other things, from certain things, from certain food, viz., such as is naturally adapted to excite the passive part of our soul, concerning which it will be requisite to consider as

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Taylor draws attention to the fact that Porphyry called the conduct of Firmus 'illegitimate', flesh-eating being contrary to the laws of 'genuine' philosophy and Platonic First Principles. Thomas Taylor, *Select Works of Porphyry* (1823: London: The Prometheus Trust, 1994) p. 8.

follows: There are two functions whose streams irrigate the bond by which the soul is bound to the body; and from which the soul being filled as with deadly potions, becomes oblivious of the proper objects of her contemplation. These fountains are pleasure and pain; of which sense indeed is preparative, and the perception which is according to sense, together with the imagination, opinions, and recollections which accompany the sense. But from these, the passions being excited, and the whole of the irrational nature becoming fattened, the soul is drawn downward, and abandons its proper love to true Being. As much as possible, therefore, we must separate ourselves from these. But the separation must be effected by an avoidance of the passions which subsist through the senses and the irrational part. But the senses are employed either on objects of the sight, or of the hearing, or of the taste, or the smell, or the touch; for sense as it were the metropolis of that foreign colony of passions which we contain.

(*Abst.* 1. 33).

Meat, explains Porphyry, fuels ‘carnal’ passions, firmly attaching the soul to the material, through the lusts of the body. The idea of a ‘colony’ of passions suggests the threat of the inscription of chaotic impurities upon a potentially inscrutable self. Porphyry’s argument against the absorption of another body into one’s own is that abstinence, in contrast, aids the purification and release of the soul from the material conditions of the body. Escaping earthly existence is dependent upon the release of the soul from a carnality characterised by death and destruction, which are themselves perpetuated by the consumption of the animal, and which are for him conceptual opposites to the creative principle of the Prime Cause. Thus Porphyry’s assertion is that to have this death and destruction on a plate, to face it literally, and to introduce it into the body, is to partake of that which is prohibitive and contrary to the release of the immaterial soul from its material state.

In book two Porphyry discusses the origins and reasons for religious sacrifice, and the relation between the act of sacrifice and the consumption of flesh. One of Porphyry’s

most important assertions is that God(s) want, rather than the material offerings of the flesh, some measure of sacrifice freely given by the human soul:

for sacrifice is, as the name implies, something holy. But no one is holy who requires the benefit from things which are the property of another ... But soul is much more honourable than the vegetable productions of the earth, which it is not fit, by sacrificing animals, that we should take away ... For, though all things are in reality the property of the Gods, yet plants appear to be our property; since we sow and cultivate them, and nourish them by other attentions which we pay them.

(*Abst.* 2. 12 - 13).

The soul alone, for Porphyry, can offer sacrifice. Nothing material can be given to God, because it is all His in the first instance. Forfeiture must be self - sacrifice, or it is no sacrifice at all. Nothing may be given to that which is already complete: if it could be given it could also be taken away. Additionally, Porphyry states that material sacrifices are immaterial to immortal gods, because there is nothing material which is not immediately impure to an immaterial nature. The highest and only real sacrifice that can be offered are the first fruits of spiritual endeavour:

It is necessary, therefore, that being conjoined with and assimilated to him, we should offer to him, as a sacred sacrifice, the elevation of our intellect which offering will be both a hymn and our salvation ... in an impassive contemplation of this divinity of the soul the sacrifice to him is effected in perfection. ... as therefore, the husbandman offers handfuls of the fruits and berries which the season first produces; thus also we should offer to the divinities the first-fruits of our conceptions of their transcendent excellence, giving them thanks for the contemplation which they impart to us, and for truly nourishing us through the vision of themselves, which they afford us, associating with, appearing to, and shining upon us, for our salvation.

(*Abst.* 2. 34).

As Aquinas, who in the early period of scholasticism sees the defining characteristic of all animate flesh as the habitual and addictive need to fulfil uncontrollable bodily urges and sexual impulses, or passions [*motus in animali*],<sup>54</sup> Porphyry views as obsessive the sacrifice and consumption of flesh. It is the deluded propagation of physical passion and lusts, which may become the arbiter of thought, yet have malefic effects upon the soul. Understanding that the body is anchored on earth by a superficial enjoyment of the material, and that consuming animal flesh constitutes an abuse of Being itself, Porphyry advocates abstention from flesh for the sake of the animal, as the cessation of destruction of one's self. As an alternative mankind should be actively instrumental in creation, endeavouring to be similar to God: 'this is affected through an entire liberation from the dominion of the passions, an evolved perception of truly existing beings, and a vital tendency towards them.' (*Abst.* 2. 44).

Book three of *On Abstinence* focuses on the notion that the more humane a man is the closer he is to divinity. Porphyry refers to Pythagoras when he asserts that if we can extend our uniquely human faculty for compassion and understanding to animals we shall succeed in doing so to our fellow men. The rational deductions of natural law may allow man to treat it compassionately, resulting in a communal harmony of man with animal as its logical consequence. Understanding that the boundary between human and non-human animals could be seen as negligible when both are seen as flesh, Pythagoras had propounded a comprehensive understanding that to establish a harmless diet is a moral absolute which makes flesh - eating unthinkable, and guards against the cannibalism characteristic of some cultures. Porphyry puts the favourite argument of Pythagoras, that 'he who abstains from anything animated ... will be much more careful not to injure those of his own species. For he who loves the genus will not hate any species of animals.' (*Abst.* 3. 26).<sup>55</sup> Neither were sacrifice and consumption purely academic subjects for Porphyry and his time. In times of emergency as well as a celebratory act of victory, the Scythians practised cannibalism, the boundary between animal and human flesh being indistinct to them. In his *Kata*

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<sup>54</sup> 'Unde semper actum appetitus sensitivi concomitatur aliqua transmutatio corporis, et maxime circa cor, quod est primum principium motus in animali' *ST*, pt 1, Q1, A1 ad.

<sup>55</sup> This understanding of man's genus as an animal and his relationship to other species is discussed at length below, 2. 1.

*Christianōn (Against the Christians)* Porphyry refers to such ‘foul’ Scythian practices, and draws comparisons with Christian thought and practices when he criticises the saying of Jesus that ‘unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will have no life in yourselves.’<sup>56</sup> Porphyry finds the idea depraved, absurd, and out of keeping with the tone of other sayings of Christ. It is an important point that Porphyry refutes the notion that ‘*Dixit ergo eis Iesus: Amen, amen dico vobis, nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis et biberitis eius sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis*’, or the notion that whoever eats the flesh and drinks my blood of Christ will have eternal life (John 6. 54), may be taken in any literal – or carnal – sense, and must neither indicate through its symbolism any ontological approval of the consumption of flesh. Porphyry is scathing about the Eucharist, not merely as a symbolic gesture or enactment, but because the Christians interpret the eucharistic words of Jesus allegorically. In this sense, his complaint is that uneducated individuals would not understand the words in the spiritual or mystical sense of their meaning: ‘No tale designed to fool the simple-minded is crueller or more deceptive than this myth of the Christians.’ (*AC* p. 50). There is a sense too in which the Eucharistic meal may have become popular at Saint Paul’s instigation. Charles Freeman suggests that Paul’s influence may have dictated the representations and understandings of the Eucharist:

He certainly seems to have been responsible for suggesting ways in which commitment to the Christian community could be expressed, through the rite of baptism, and sustained, through the Eucharist. His first letter to the Corinthians insists on the importance of all, whether rich or poor, sharing a communal meal at which bread is eaten and wine is drunk in commemoration of Christ’s death [1 Cor. 11: 17 - 34]. This letter dates from about AD 55 and some scholars suggest that it was Paul who, drawing on what he had heard from the Apostles of the Last Supper, established the Eucharist as a repeatable ritual. The Gospel writers, writing later than this, of course, may have recast

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<sup>56</sup> The fragments of Porphyry’s diatribe survive in the extracts of notary Macarius Magnes, and are reproduced in *Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*, ed. and trans. by R. J. Hoffmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 49.

their own descriptions of the last supper to accord with the existing practice of emerging Christian groups.<sup>57</sup>

Freeman highlights the way in which Paul may have influenced the establishment and format of eucharistic practices as a way individuals could express their commitment to the Christian community. In contrast, Christ's sacrificial act should be seen, for Porphyry, as a sacrifice of the self for the benefit of all other creation – not at its expense. The notion that sacrifice must be a giving of oneself, and not a taking from creation, in Porphyry's argument, follows through to his observations that animal sacrifice might have had some material validity when agricultural breeding was the basis of the prosperity of a market economy and the sacrifice itself a genuine giving-up of important commodities. In his contemporary Roman world, however, he finds such practices cruel, unnecessary, and a self-indulgent vice typifying the violence which characterised the public life of Roman society. Current critical appraisals of early Christianity tend to see Constantine's sponsorship of the religion as a politically expedient act which unifies the western empire under a single religion; in the process a plethora of diverse Christian practices are standardised, but done so in line with an existing Roman ideology which, as a sacrificing culture, is indifferent to the animal's role in creation.<sup>58</sup>

Porphyry finds that sense perceptions, illness, and passions are commonly shared between humans and animals, and suggests this to be a physical and moral common denominator in an ethical view of the animal. The *sensoria* of the flesh is the same for all, as is the affliction of illness and death (*Abst.* 2. 43; 3. 7). From this assertion his argument progresses from the bodily to the intellect. He makes a distinction between 'reason' which is 'any such faculty' that man and animal may have alike, and the 'right reason' of human moral agency (*Abst.* 3. 1 - 2). Porphyry highlights that there is a problem with such a distinction, when he says that not all men have 'right Reason', some of them being in a sense 'depraved'. Some animals, in contrast, are more acutely sensitive: 'animals whose sensitive powers are more exquisite, are more

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<sup>57</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix A 'Constantine's sponsorship of Christianity'.

prudent.’ (*Abst.* 3. 8).<sup>59</sup> This idea that the innate reason of the animal constitutes a sign of God’s divine plan is central to Christian thought, and I discuss it in detail below. Porphyry also finds that in relation to the Prime Cause reason operates in different ways. A self - aware human reason should be able to bring about its own salvation, though animal reasoning has no moral agency because it has no free - will. On these terms animals can, for Porphyry, do no wrong. He also makes an observation which will become central to Christian attitudes to the animal as a sign of God’s order in creation: ‘If, however, it be requisite to speak the truth, not only reason may plainly be perceived in all animals, but in many of them it is so great as to approximate to perfection.’ (*Abst.* 3. 2). The animal, which can perform acts which men cannot, is a clear manifestation and sign of the creator, his intention, and the perfect design of his creation.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in these terms the objection that animals cannot enunciate a rational discourse is challenged by Porphyry in his observation that their voiceless nature does not mean that they do not have a discourse in common with their creator, which Porphyry calls a discourse of the soul:

Do [animals] not discursively perceive the manner in which they are inwardly affected, before it is vocally enunciated by them? By a discursive perception, however, I mean the perception produced by a silent discourse which takes place in the soul.

(*Abst.* 3. 2).

In fact the human law of speech offers a language which is incapable of effectively representing such a transcendent communion. For Porphyry it is not man alone who is in possession of sentient intelligence ‘but other animals conformably to the laws which they receive from the Gods and nature.’ (*Abst.* 3. 2) A discourse of the soul must transcend language because language itself is inadequate to communicate the innate, God - given qualities of the soul. It is just as probable that animals have an

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<sup>59</sup> Porphyry refers to Aristotle’s *De anima.*, 3. 427 b 14 ff. Elsewhere Aristotle states that ‘some of the animals whose blood is watery have a specially subtle intelligence ... a more mobile faculty of sensation. This is why, as I said before, some of the bloodless creatures have a more intelligent soul than some of the blooded ones.’ *Parts* 650 b 20 - 25.

<sup>60</sup> Discussed at length below chapter three, 3. 2 (b).



internal discourse (abstract thought, no matter how limited), as the probability of the existence of God who created them, and for Porphyry they are inseparably one and the same.

In an appeal which looks forward to William Langland's theocentric representation of the animal in *Piers Plowman* Porphyry asks that it be granted, therefore, that animals participate in reason to a greater or lesser degree because it cannot be admitted that one animal has reason while another does not.

In good men, likewise, there is not the same equality; for Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, are not similarly good. Nor is there sameness in a conclusion of opinions. Hence it does not follow, if we have more intelligence than other animals, that on this account they be deprived of intelligence; as neither must it be said that partridges do not fly, because hawks fly higher. (*Abst.* 3. 2)

For Porphyry Aristotle's natural hierarchy, in which there are different levels of intelligence, does not imply that a lower level of intelligence should have less ethical validity in the corporeal world. Porphyry's *Eisagōgē*, or 'introduction' and commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, goes to great lengths to affirm their philosophical legitimacy, though for once he disagrees with his master Plotinus.<sup>61</sup> Another work which Porphyry wrote on Aristotle's *Categories*, entitled *On the Unity of Plato's and Aristotle's Philosophy*, exists only in fragments. But those fragments and the *Eisagōgē* defend the 'categorical doctrine expounded by Aristotle by rejecting any claim identifying categories with "genera of Being."'<sup>62</sup> In the strictest sense Porphyry sees that Aristotle's categories apply to the material world, which is why he accepts the categories as Aristotle describes them without reduction or modification. He sees his master Plotinus' approach as mistakenly applying the categories (in Porphyry's view intended to account for the *natural* world) to the intelligible and supernatural realm, and then criticising them as inapplicable.

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<sup>61</sup> Evangeliou. C., *Aristotle's Categories and Porphyry*, Philosophia Antiqua series Vol. 48. (London: E. J. Brill, 1988) p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Evangeliou *ibid.*, pp. 5 - 6.

A divine nature, indeed, does not become rational through learning, for there never was a time in which he was irrational; but rationality is consubsistent with his existence, and he is not prevented from being rational, because he did not receive reason through discipline: though, with respect to other animals in the same as with respect to men, many things are taught them by nature, and some things are imparted by discipline. Brutes, however, learn some things from each other, but are taught others, as we have said, by men. They also have memory, which is a most principal thing in the resumption of reason and prudence.

(*Abst.* 3. 10).

This statement pre-empts Augustinian understandings of innate levels of reason, though here Porphyry specifically places any hierarchies of reason within a material or corporeal context, in line with his understanding of Aristotle's hierarchies. While animals have innate reason, man has the ability to increase his reason. Porphyry compares man and animal, though he sees the bad qualities in men - which prohibit them from performing properly - as being far worse than those in the animal, because man has free-will and moral agency. In striking similarity to the thought of Augustine, Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Langland, Porphyry describes the way that animals build nests, have natural sagacity and prudence, know where and how to mate in exemplary fashion, and preserve a natural justice toward each other in a way that man does not. He sees this as a clear rationale, strengthening his argument with the observation that because we cannot do what they can do, nor understand how they do it, does not mean that the divinity is not in some way present to, or in them (*Abst.* 3. 11).<sup>63</sup> If this innate presence is not admitted, man, also an animal in the corporeal context, may not be seen to have a subsistence of reason by which he may come to know his self, and thus 'increase' himself to receive divinity as he is 'naturally adapted to receive it.' (*Abst.* 3. 10).

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<sup>63</sup> See below chapter one, 1. 6, and Chapter three, 3. 2 (b).

### 1. 3 Porphyry's exclusion from Christian spiritual and philosophical thought, and selective re-introduction.

It is remarkable that despite the sophistication of Porphyry's argument against the utilisation of the animal, it is excluded from Christian thought. This section of the thesis demonstrates the importance of Porphyry's thought to Christianity. His influence is considerable; commentators seek - out and engage with his work. Yet *On Abstinence* is seen as insignificant, and is ignored. This omission of the work is clearly an ideological one; an ethic of the animal is not convenient for early Christianity. It compromises humankind's 'right' to act solely with itself and its own salvation in mind. And the need for Christianity to survive requires the political measure of gaining the sponsorship of the state, and assimilating itself into existing cultural practices.

The middle - Platonists of the first century turned both to monism and a doctrine of providence. By the second century the school's major representatives were Albinus (*Eisagōgē*) and Apuleius (*De Platone*). By the end of the second century Aristotle's teaching on logic and the categories was playing a considerable role among the Neoplatonists, though was officially heretical to Christian doctrine. Christians, at this point, criticised Aristotelianism as excessively subtle, and forms of Platonism were more popularly employed.<sup>64</sup> By the third century, Plotinus and Porphyry come to influence a transition of thought from Gnostic dualism to Christian non - dualism. Philosophically, Porphyry's greater involvement in the world than his master Plotinus is evident by his interest in a universal way of salvation available to and including all

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<sup>64</sup> For a short period during the life of Plotinus the Emperor Julian (the 'Apostate', 361 - 363) had sponsored Neoplatonism as a rival to Christianity, See Hamlyn, *op cit.*, p. 87.

men, as well as in his direct conflict with Christianity.<sup>65</sup> The philosophical project of Porphyry's treatise *Against the Christians* was to devalue Christianity by attacking its modes of allegorical interpretation in favour of an alternative engagement with a way of finding universal salvation for all creation, and can be seen as an intellectual reaction against the monotheistic claims of Christian gnosticism. Little is left of Porphyry's massive output, making a conclusion hazardous as to the degree of influence of his Neoplatonic anti-gnosticism on Christian anti-gnosticism, though it is commonly agreed that 'it is possible to trace much of Porphyry's thought from authors whom he influenced'<sup>66</sup> and to do so through Augustine in particular.

Porphyry's writing has more influence than might be expected given the unpopularity of *Against the Christians* both during and after his lifetime. The transmission of his writings into major channels of philosophical as well as mystical thought is exciting to trace. One contribution in particular was taken very seriously, preoccupying the Middle Ages and providing much of its philosophical terminology. Instigated in a remark about the status of species in his discussion on Aristotle's *Categories* the *Eisagōgē* stated the problem of 'universals'. It discusses the notions of genus, species, difference, property, and accident. At its most basic level the *Eisagōgē* questions how we know things in both real and abstract senses. The question is of whether universals are things or merely words. For instance, all men belong to the species Man, and 'man' is a universal term as opposed to 'Porphyry', or 'this man', which are words referring to an individual. There was one question which grew out of the debate and preoccupied philosophers and theologians alike: Does a word like 'species' or 'man' truly relate a thing (the view of the realists) or are words abstract conditions and the only universals (the position of nominalism)? The three specific questions which began the debate, and with which Boethius heads his translation runs thus:

For example, I shall beg off saying anything about (a) whether genera and species are real or are situated in bare thought alone, (b) whether as real they are bodies or incorporeals, and (c) whether they are separated or in sensibles

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<sup>65</sup> A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post - Plotinic Neoplatonism*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974) p. XVII.

<sup>66</sup> Smith. *ibid.*, p. xv.

and have their reality in connection with them. Such business is profound, and requires another, greater investigation.<sup>67</sup>

Porphyry raises three important questions of category and about the metaphysical status of universals in order to clarify them, though he modestly refuses to answer them himself: are our abilities to discriminate between things (genera and species) real or abstract? if they are real is their reality material or immaterial? or are they situated in thought alone - in which case they must have been subsistent in us before we learned through the senses? In his 'Second Commentary' Boethius commented upon the above remark of Porphyry, and highlights it as a concern that the status of species and genera seems uncertain. As other writers comment upon Boethius' observation, these 'predicables' come to fix much of the vocabulary for subsequent medieval discussions, containing as they do 'some of the most consequential lines in the entire history of Philosophy.'<sup>68</sup> P. V. Spade observes how important Porphyry is to Christian thought:

But he cannot be taken by himself. His importance lies in the fact that his *Isagoge* was translated into Latin in the early Middle Ages as the occasion for discussing the problem of universals directly and in detail. It was as though commentators found his silence intolerable and were irresistibly drawn into the very questions Porphyry had declined to discuss.<sup>69</sup>

Boethius concurrently translated Porphyry's *Eisagōgē* and Aristotle's *Organon* as an aid to his interest in logic. He looked back to both Plato and Aristotle to find a solution as to whether species or genera, and therefore universals, exist in sensible things or whether they exist, as Plato supposed, in separation from bodies. While Plato thought universals were real, and that they alone truly exist, Aristotle rejected this, analysing individuals as consisting of a form, which makes them the sort of thing

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<sup>67</sup> P. V. Spade, (trans. & ed.) *Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham*, (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994) p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Spade *ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>69</sup> Spade *ibid.*, p. xv.

that they are (i.e. a man, cow, or dog). These forms are universal for him, and intellectual knowledge is based on the mind's power to abstract them from individuals,<sup>70</sup> thereby inverting Aristotle's premise that only the universal is scientifically knowable by placing the immediate importance upon the particular form which will allow a universal to be predicated – a general trend in medieval thought. It can be seen that from Porphyry, the problem is transmitted through Boethius to the later Middle Ages. The Arabic translator Averroes offers a commentary, Peter Abelard 'glosses on Porphyry' in his *Logica ingredientibus*, Duns Scotus' 'ordinatio' has 'Six Questions on Individuation' and William of Ockham's 'Ordinatio' has 'Five Questions on Universals.'<sup>71</sup> On the whole the twelfth century is 'nominalist' in that it does not read Porphyry's *Eisagōgē* and *Categories* as though they are about things but, as Roscelin (1045-1120), treated them as a discussion about words.<sup>72</sup>

It is ironic that Porphyry's contribution to Christian thought, and in particular to early scholasticism, is of immense importance, yet *On Abstinence* has no place in that thought. Porphyry's literary output in his later years was characteristically both Aristotelian and anti-Christian. As noted above his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* goes to great lengths to affirm their philosophical legitimacy contrary to Plotinus' application of the categories to the intelligible and supernatural realm. Despite Porphyry's protestations on the point, later commentators such as Aquinas maintain that active reason must be capable of illuminating what is abstracted, revealing to the mind the nature of the created object, and thus extending the

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<sup>70</sup> Boethius' answer, expounded out of deference to Aristotle, was that universals do pertain to the real, though talking about them is abstraction from the real: 'universals subsist in sensibles although they are understood apart from bodies.' A 'universal' signifies a unity with reference to some plurality. Unlike the singular, which cannot be communicated, the universal is by definition something that is communicated or communicable to many. This works in three different modes; *Essence*: which is universal when possessed by many individuals. *Causality (in causando)*: a cause is said to be universal when it is capable of producing specifically different effects. And thought (*in significando*): a concept, idea or term is said to be universal when it signifies a certain plurality, such as a) representing many individual men by a single term or enunciation or b) when predicable in many i.e. the term 'man' is univocally applied of many men. 'Most properly, the universals are the five ways in which one term can be predicated univocally of another. These logical universals are second intentions that can be discussed as such, viz, genus, difference, species, property, and accident, or as applied to a particular nature known first as intentionality, e.g. man as species, genus, animal.' *NCE* Vol. 14 p. 452 c ff.

<sup>71</sup> Spade *op cit.*, pp. 20, 26, 57, 68.

<sup>72</sup> The exception is Abelard who rejects the approach except with regard to species and genera, which he does not doubt as correctly describing the structure of the world. Abelard sees the problem as philosophical rather than interpretative.

categories into the realm of the transcendent. Aquinas' account of the acquisition of knowledge and the role of reason makes no claim to pre-existent knowledge in general. As an empiricist he thinks all concepts and understandings of things are derived from sense perception alone. He is also a moderate realist in regard to the problem of universals, believing that 'species' and what we know of the real world is sense-derived. Formally speaking while Aristotle's idea of sense - perception seems physiological, and Aquinas' focus psychological: they are in fact identical in insisting on identifying knower with known, and providing a perspective which would seem to privilege the individual.

#### 1. 4 Neoplatonism and Augustine: who is *really* left out?

Porphyry's exclusion from the Christian theological canon has its origins in his attack on Christianity, earning him the reputation of being the greatest enemy that the Christian religion had. *Against the Christians* was publicly burnt, first by Constantine and then by Theodosius.<sup>73</sup> Constantine, in a letter written after the first council of Nicaea (325) states:

Porphyry, that enemy of piety, has received a fit reward for his impious writings against religion, so that he is made infamous to all future times, and covered with reproach, and his impious writings have been destroyed.<sup>74</sup>

Initially Constantine, and then Theodosius the younger in the edict of 381, ordered the abolition of the works of Porphyry and outlawed the use of his work. In the introduction to her edition, Wynne - Tyson defends Porphyry in relation to the philosophy of *On Abstinence*:

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<sup>73</sup> In another respect too, Theodosius' reign forms a conclusion. It consummates Constantine's religious policy by raising Christianity to the position of the state religion in 381. Henceforth adherence to Paganism is a political offence. See E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, (1953: London: Routledge And Kegan Paul, 1979) p. 22.

<sup>74</sup> Wynne - Tyson *op cit.*, p. 6.

These were not, as Constantine states “against religion”, but against the false and inhumane teachings of the establishment of his times. For the Neoplatonists, of whom Porphyry and his Master [Plotinus] were the finest examples, taught the philosophy of religion in its purest form.<sup>75</sup>

Wynne - Tyson goes on to explain that for Augustine Neoplatonist thought ‘scattered the darkness of error.’ As already observed Porphyry’s work in general, though initially banned, has a tremendous influence on medieval thought, even if *On Abstinence* does not. Few treatises have survived the burning of Porphyry’s books and hatred of his enemies, though there is tacit agreement that he was not an enemy of Christianity itself, but of the practices and interpretations which grew from it. While he advocated and practised a more consistently humane ethic than that taught by the church of his day he remained, for some considerable time, an heretical figure. But it is in spite of the opposition of the Church to his work, and due to the fact that his philosophy is read and commentated upon by Christians such as Boethius and Augustine, that Porphyry re-emerges as an important figure.

Neoplatonism and Greek Patristic theology at the dawn of the fourth century was the prevailing philosophy in Christian as well as in pagan circles. Both took as their religious ideal a direct apprehension of the Divine Essence, and in his reading of Neoplatonic texts Augustine came to see Porphyry as a pagan mystic whose writing represented an unambiguous doctrine of spiritual experience, thereby proving him to be in possession of Christian Truth. Despite the apparent unpopularity of attributing anything to Porphyry in regard to Augustine,<sup>76</sup> Augustine’s earliest influence was the dominant Neoplatonism, as embodied in Porphyry’s *Sententiae*. A. H. Armstrong comments that:

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<sup>75</sup> Wynne – Tyson *ibid*.

<sup>76</sup> While the *NCE* sees Porphyry as a motivating influence behind Christian persecution, and not the other way around, the Catholic Philosopher Robert O’Connell delimits Porphyry’s credibility to the realms of metaphysical logic, paying no attention to *The Abstinences*. See Robert O’Connell’s ‘Porphyrianism in the Early Augustine’ In *From Augustine To Eriugena: Essays On Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honour of John O Meara*, ed. by F. X. Martin and O. S. A. Richmond (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991) pp. 131 - 133.



It does not appear ... that we can account for the tendency, which is so marked in the fourth century onwards, to push the negative theology very much into the background by simply regarding it as the inevitable result of Porphyrian metaphysics or the Christian theological presuppositions that made the Porphyrian way of looking at reality attractive to Christians.<sup>77</sup>

Armstrong is drawing attention to the fact that as with the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, in negative theology the predicates of the world are not seen to apply to God, and to make any statement about Him would be to predicate of Him what He is not.<sup>78</sup> He is subject to none of our language or conceptions, even through his revealed names of Father, Son, or Spirit, which are all drawn from human experience. They are given us in order to point towards a reality in the Godhead, and in this sense may only be known negatively through things that indicate his existence. However, what Neoplatonism offered to an understanding of the Godhead which Christianity did not, was the idea of apophasis, or the state of psychic integration accomplished by suspending all mental words or images of the One, which would so characterise Augustine's *Logocentric* understanding of illumination.<sup>79</sup> Because of this suspension, which is seldom if ever complete, one is better able transparently to perceive - and precisely respond to - the compelling force and content of immediate experience.<sup>80</sup> This apparently mystical approach to the divine had considerable influence on Augustine, whose reading of 'the noble philosopher' Porphyry, inspired his own search for mystical experience. In 386 he read the sentences (*sententiae*) of Porphyry while living at Cassiciacum, documented in the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*. The *Dialogues* express his Neoplatonic thinking in the direction of a creationist metaphysic, in the consideration of being and non-being, as well as in relation to the

<sup>77</sup> Armstrong *op cit.*, 'Apophasis – Kataphatic Tensions', in *From Augustine to Eriugen*, pp. 11 - 13.

<sup>78</sup> Aquinas recognises this problem as a specifically grammatical one, and supplies an answer, which I discuss in detail below, 3. 3 (d).

<sup>79</sup> Discussed below in relation to Augustine's literary theory and interiority, chapter three: 3. 1 (a).

<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of the trinal nature of the *Nous* and the inability to conceptualise as finite the infinite One in Neoplatonic thought see Kenneth Guthrie, trans., *Porphyry's Launch Points to the Realm of Mind: An Introduction to the Neoplatonic Philosophy of Plotinus* (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1988) pp. 7 - 14.

idea that there were degrees of being. He also read the *Enneads* and Porphyry's *De regressu animae* (*Return of the Soul*) which 'removed some on his philosophical roadblocks'<sup>81</sup> in understanding the necessity of asceticism of the body as 'preparation for the contemplation of the One, God.'<sup>82</sup> At a philosophical level Augustine's Neoplatonist experience of interiority and transcendence saved him from the materialism of a sense dominated imagination which he laments in *Confessions*.<sup>83</sup> Theologically, Augustine's discovery of divine transcendence and of a trinity in Neoplatonism was attributable to his reading of the Christian Neoplatonic adaptations of the man who brought him to conversion, St. Ambrose (c.339 - 97).<sup>84</sup> The 'soul of the world' contains 'in itself the principle of that which is triply indivisible, and being naturally self - motive, is adopted to be moved in a beautiful and orderly manner, and also to move the body of the world, according to the most excellent reasons.' (*ABST.* 2. 37). The Porphyrian - Plotinic concept of a Divine Mover complemented both the Christian divinity and the (initially rather confused) concept of the Christian Trinity. From Porphyry, Augustine came to see that the highest point (the *summa essentia*) offered absolute repose (*requies*) and immutability (*incommutabilitas*), attainable through a ceaseless desire to reach the dynamic equilibrium of the One.<sup>85</sup> Neoplatonism was the purest mysticism understood by mystics of all faiths, but was fiercely challenged by orthodox religion, because it threatened the mediating power of the church over its congregation. If it was possible for men directly to approach God there would be no need for the mediation of the church, and in turn the state who use the church to ensure public order on earth; the mysticism of Neoplatonism, in

<sup>81</sup> M. T. Clark, *Augustine* (London: Continuum, 2000) p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> M. T. Clark *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>83</sup> *C* 2, 2. 2 - 4; *C* 4, 2. 2; *C* 8, 12. 29.

<sup>84</sup> Ambrose's adaptation of the Neoplatonic trinity is based on Plotinus, *Enn.* V. 7; *Enn.* V. 9, 8; *Enn.* V. 1, 5; *Enn.* V. 5. 6: 28 - 34 *cf.*, *Enn.* II. 4. 5; for a detailed discussion see John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth Press, 1977) pp. 348 - 349.

<sup>85</sup> See Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996) p. 10. Porphyry was the editor and biographer of Plotinus and published his master's philosophical writings at some point between 301 and 305, rearranging the corpus into the six *Enneads*, or 'groups of nine'. It was a selection of these together with the now vanished writings of Porphyry himself that Augustine read in Milan in the spring of 386 in the Latin translation of the rhetorician Marius Victorinus. On Porphyry's role in Augustine's Platonism see Brian Stock's *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) p. 39. The description of the trinity in *Ennead* V. 5. 6: 28 - 34 is particularly important to Christianity. Freeman observes that 'Basil's inspiration for the terminology of the Trinity appears to have been the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus' and discussed the subject at length. Freeman *op cit.*, p. 192 ff.

contrast, had the sole aim to transcend material existence - reason, language and state included.

For Augustine, Porphyry inspires an 'urgency' in his defence of the human access to the truth.<sup>86</sup> Porphyry's definition of the absolute as incorporeal, immovable, and not in want of any thing external to Himself must be seen from the contingent, human perspective, of a world of things. Speaking of the concept of a single God Armstrong states that:

The senses in which 'being' is used of the One-being, or 'thought' of the Divine Intellect, or of our thought when we have reached its level and are fully aware of it, remain somewhat mysterious to followers of the tradition and puzzling, or even non – sensical, to a great many of our own philosophical contemporaries. This is why it was not difficult for Porphyry and those who followed his line to draw the One-being upwards into the One.<sup>87</sup>

The Divine Intellect of the One-Being, of which all being is a part, may finally be drawn to the One - or in Christian terms, God. Porphyry's assertion that the way this must be done is through abstention is cognate with the ascetism and contemplation which characterises Augustine's *Confessions*.<sup>88</sup> However, for Porphyry this ascetism, which draws all men toward divinity, involves an abstinence from corporeal flesh:

... ought we not to sustain every thing, though of the most afflictive nature, with equanimity, for the sake of being purified from internal disease, since our contest is for immortality, and an association with divinity, from which we are prevented through an association with the body? By no means, therefore, ought we to follow the laws of the body, which are violent and adverse to the laws of intellect, and to the paths which lead to salvation. Since, however, we do not now philosophise about the endurance of pain, but about the rejection

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<sup>86</sup> M. T. Clark *op cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> Armstrong *op cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> C 7. 10, 16.

of pleasures which are not necessary, what apology can remain for those, who imprudently endeavour to defend their own intemperance?

(*Abst.* 1. 56).

Abstention from eating animals lightens the burden of man's material body for its ascent to the Real: introducing one body nature into another will prohibit salvation. Enacting a moral, humane ethic, in which care is shown for all earthly manifestations of the One, will purify man's soul. Nevertheless, where the dominant Christian ideology offers an illusion of autonomy and self-determination, contingent upon the official channel of the church, Porphyry's account of individual agency in which action can bring about salvation, presents a narrative at odds with such officially sanctioned Christian ideology. The church could not accept Porphyry or the Neoplatonic 'One' on any terms but its own. Consequently, no matter how important the Neoplatonism of Porphyry is to Christian thought his ethic of abstinence is absent from its doctrine. Porphyry has suffered the 'dexterity and assiduity with which this information has been misrepresented, concealed or allowed to pass into oblivion by those endeavouring to impose a different philosophy on humanity'<sup>89</sup> In all of Augustine's writing the Neoplatonic apparatus of spiritual attainment (in which abstinence from flesh is an essential component) may be pinpointed; yet in none of his writings are animal ethics discussed at length. While Porphyry's view on animals is excluded from any canon of intellectual thought, the essence of his ascetic spirituality is taken particularly seriously, though the version which we know through Augustine is one in which what is *really* left out is a consideration or contemplation of the status or spiritual importance of the animal.

### 1. 5 *Against the Christians: allegoresis and interpretative strategies*

An analysis of allegoresis and interpretative strategies is important to the animal argument, because it highlights the way that different modes of reading the world and

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<sup>89</sup> Wynne - Tyson *op cit.*, p. 6.

its texts, dictates the way that the animal is understood. Saint Paul, unlike Porphyry relies on revelation, and places faith over reason. In his version of the resurrection, he can be seen to close the western mind to Hellenic thought. In turn, Porphyry's analysis of Paul's writing isolates the way that Paul recommends the authority of state control, promotes Roman policing, and seems to delimit thought to that narrowly prescribed by himself, and Roman culture. More seriously, for Porphyry, Paul is intent on individual human salvation, regardless of all else, in such a way as to suggest that he is firmly Gnostic. As an anti-Gnostic, and more in line with later Christian doctrine, Porphyry highlights problems with the way Paul devalues creation, and seemingly denies God's immediate presence in the world. Indeed, stylistic differences in reading are closely involved with the perception of animals, and subsequently dictate theological values and attitudes to creation.

During his lifetime Porphyry was a renowned scholar of Christian scripture and Christian modes of allegorical interpretation, yet he refuses to accept the readings of the New Testament which were approved of and followed by the early church. Despite his familiarity with Christian texts, he refutes Christian exegesis as ingenious misreadings of scripture, calculated to justify the right of the state to control individual thought. Porphyry's attack is not so much upon the words and lessons of Jesus, as on the subsequent interpretations of His teachings, and in particular on Paul's inability to base his Christianity on any authentic gospel or text at all. Porphyry's arguments should be seen in the context of the persecution of Neoplatonists, and as a response to the right to permanent existence granted to Christianity by Constantine in 312. Equally, Porphyry's attack can be modified by attributing much of the contradiction that he finds to Paul's over-eagerness to form an institution of Christianity, resulting in the hasty composition of his letters. Charles Freeman has remarked that '[t]he difficult circumstances in which [Paul] wrote can explain much of the coherence and contradiction in his letters, which have taxed theologians ever since. He seems to have failed to absorb, or at least express in his letters, any real awareness of Jesus as a human being, or to reflect his teachings ...',<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, p. 124.

Paul's apparent lack of awareness of Jesus' life and teachings results in the two main criticisms which characterise Porphyry's *Against the Christians*. His first claim is that Paul uses Jesus to assist the jurisdiction of 'state' power by legitimising it with His spiritual authority. He sees that 'the teaching of the Christians is self - contradictory: they look for the end of the world, but what they really want is control of the empire.'<sup>91</sup> His second criticism is aimed at critical approaches to textual material, and in particular at the rhetorical and interpretative strategies of early Christian hermeneutics. Porphyry's approach is to begin by examining the New Testament at its literal sense, though by refusing to bring a comprehensive allegorical reading or interpretation of his own he allows the cleric Macarius Magnes (the commentator and notary who copies the work to criticise it, thereby preserving it from destruction) to answer the 'errors' of each criticism. As with early scholasticism's suspicion of the poetic allegoresis of imaginative literature, Porphyry approaches Christian scriptural allegoresis with a profound suspicion that Christianity is too ready to accept that its texts are authentic or suitable material for contemplation. Porphyry also objects to Paul's use of hyperbole to win converts, and his lack of textual evidence or reasonable philosophical argument. In this way, *Against the Christians* presents a site of scrutinising awareness that spiritual 'truth' presented in the form of an allegorical narrative, can be problematic because it is interpretative. In order to illustrate this Porphyry begins his treatise at the literal sense by criticising the differing accounts of the Gospels, observing that the selected accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are far from concordant:

Where one says "into your hands I *will* deliver my spirit," another says "it is finished" and another "my god, my god, why have you forsaken me," and another "My God, my God why do you punish me?"

(AC p. 33).

Macarius' commentary designates the philosopher's view 'Hellenic' because of its literal sense logic, and then uses allegory to override the apparent *literatim* contradictions of the text, interpreting obvious inconsistencies as peculiarities of style,

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<sup>91</sup> Hoffmann *op cit.*, p. 17.

and adding that the eye witnesses were drunk with fear at the ‘earthquake and the crash of rock around them.’ (AC p. 33, citing Matt. 27. 51 – 53). Macarius’ own version of the crucifixion here, employs a language of negative hyperbole to emphasis the importance and ‘otherness’ of events by an imagistically - rooted representation of the power of God. Macarius’ response to such a criticism is to extend the accepted version of the crucifixion into an imaginative fiction where phenomenal, material ‘evidence’, stresses the importance of the truth. We know that Porphyry’s critical attitude to Christian exegesis was devastating at the time, because the criticism came from someone who knew the Old and New Testament and their doctrine intimately. Hoffmann states that in his attack Porphyry

... denied the Christian teachers their favourite refuge: allegory. Porphyry dealt with the plain sense of words. Having mastered allegorical interpretation as a student of Longinus, he knew the tricks of the trade.<sup>92</sup>

Longinus<sup>93</sup> makes the distinction that poetry differs from rhetoric in being aimed not at persuasion but at transport (*ekstasis*), an effect that it achieves by means of a distinction of expression. He places a strong emphasis on the ‘sources’ of the sublime as rhetorical figures of artful expression; contemporaneously, this is unique in its resolution to translate literary technicalities into terms of spiritual inspiration. It is in the description and understanding of the crucifixion that fundamental stylistic and ideological differences of reading and understanding are revealed. Porphyry delimits the text to its literal level, where as a student of Longinus, he would expect to find a coherent philosophical rhetoric, providing spiritual insight, and highlighting ‘ruptures’ in arguments signalling parallel as well as linear readings of the text – or in fact, allegory. But because this is not presented in such a way, the events of the crucifixion

<sup>92</sup> Hoffmann, *op cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> The writer known as ‘Longinus’ or ‘Dionysius Longinus’ is elusive, his identity being truly unknown. Some agree with a date of the third century while others (the *NCE*) as early as the first century AD. What is known is that he was a Greek literary theorist and author of *Peri Hypsous* or *Treatise on the Sublime*. As it is generally accepted by philosophers such as Evangeliou that Porphyry studied under ‘Longinus’ in the third century at Athens, I assume the latter date for Porphyry’s exposure to the works attributed to ‘Longinus’ in a formative setting. See D. A. Russell & M. Winterbottom, eds., *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principle Texts in New Translations* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1972) pp. 460-61, and Evangeliou *op cit.*, p. 1.

and the symbolism attributed to it are seen by Porphyry as unconvincing and badly written poetic attempts to express ontological truth, which neither have philosophical validity, nor move the reader to believe the truth of the event.

The exegetical techniques of Longinus, Porphyry and Plotinus, defend the world against Gnostic Puritanism and do this by reading the world as a sign of the transcendent.<sup>94</sup> In contrast Paul's method of finding evidence is seen by Porphyry as inconsistent, and at times markedly Gnostic. This is evident in the way Paul's description of the resurrection seems hysterical. Indeed, Charles Freeman sees this hysteria as the frenetic negation of reason by revelation: 'Paul's Christ only has relevance through his death and resurrection, a theology presented in his own words in letters whose eloquence has reverberated through the ages.'<sup>95</sup> Paul is fanatically engaged with convincing his audience that Christ died and was buried before rising on the third day, listing those who saw Christ after his death:

*Et quia visus est Cephae, et post hoc undecim; deinde visus est plus quam quingentis fratribus simul, ex quibus multi manent usque adhuc, quidam autem dormierunt. Deinde visus est Iacobo, deinde apostolis omnibus; novissime autem omnium, tamquam abortivo, visus est et mihi.* [He was seen by Cephas, then by the eleven. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some

<sup>94</sup> Plotinus speaks against Gnostics who affirm the Creator and the cosmos itself to be Evil in *Ennead* 2. 9. It is art, especially in *Ennead* 5. 8, which allows a creative access to metaphysical ideas of form, traceable in the mathematical and musical versions of beauty as order and unity in Augustine and Boethius. *Ennead* 5. 8 'On the Intellectual Beauty' states: 'It is a principle with us [the Neoplatonists] that one who has attained to the vision of the Intellectual Cosmos and grasped the beauty of the Authentic Intellect will be able to come to understand the Father and Transcendent of that Divine Being.' Plotinus uses the example of sculpture from stone which, although beautiful as it is, is enhanced by the 'beauty of form ... or idea introduced by the art'. This creative form is not in the material but in the artificer and his participation in art. Aesthetic endeavour imitates the higher and purer degree of divinity by its appreciation of the form of things and of their creation - the source of beauty itself. Man, as a Microcosm of Creator and creation can locally de-scribe the creational mode of production there by bringing himself closer to the First Mover. As Sidney puts it of the personifications 'only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringest forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like.' Similarly, the nature of man's spirituality should be to appreciate and re-construct nature, and abstain from its destruction at whatever level. 'The Defence of Poetry', *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* Vol. 1. Sixth Edition. Gen. Ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Norton & Co, 1962) p. 410 ff.

<sup>95</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, p. 146.



have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.  
 Than last of all He was seen by me also, as one born out of due time. ]

(1 Cor. 15 : 5 - 8)

In this way Paul provides 'material' evidence in the form of a host of witnesses to an event without which nothing remarkable could be said to have occurred after the Crucifixion. Paul includes himself as a witness – but not one contemporary with the others, as his experience was a revelation or vision. Paul emphasises the empty tomb, and this, coupled with the enigmatic fragments of Gospels which defy a single narrative, leads Paul to suggest that followers should have faith in his personal account. But this also limits the meaning of Paul's statements to the value placed upon it within the culture of its first audience. The value of Paul's writing lies in its ability to persuade that first audience that Jesus was raised, and that he was *seen* to have been raised: '*si autem Christus non resurrexit, inanis est ergo praedicatio nostra, inanis est et fides vestra ... Quod si Christus non resurrexit, vana est fides vestra; adhuc enim estis in peccatis vestris*' [And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain ... And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; and you are still in your sins] (1 Cor. 15. 14 - 17). Paul enunciates the first set of expectations of the original readers, for whom there may well have been internalised, unconscious assumptions about the nature of Christ's divinity. Equally, the resurrection story could have been difficult to comprehend, and one of Porphyry's concerns is that the symbolism of the crucifixion is too complex for ordinary people to understand with no philosophical background to support it:

If Christians were to proclaim the historical reality of the rising of their Lord, they had to insist on a somewhat crude understanding of it in order to reach the masses. If they were to defend their faith from critical opponents, they had to insist on the novelty of the resurrection. Other gods died and rose; only Jesus rose in the flesh.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jones, V., 'The Phoenix and the Resurrection' in Debra Hassig (ed.) *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Life Art and Literature* (London: Garland Publishing, 1999) p. 99, citing R. M. Grant, 'The resurrection of the body', *The Journal of Religion* 28 (1948) p. 120.

A belief in the resurrection reinforced the historical reality of Christ's own resurrection and divinity. But a belief in resurrection was not easy for the early church, and faith alone was unreliable for many commentators. Symbolically, resurrection can be explained in a number of ways, and the phoenix presents one such creature whose existence becomes solely illustrative in a Christian context. The fabulous Phoenix of Herodotus, Ovid and Pliny the elder, carries multiple meanings, though in the light of scripture, the first two centuries perceives the Arabian bird with new Christian significance: '*Nemo tollit eam a me; sed ego pono eam a meipso, et potestatem habeo ponendi eam, et potestatem habeo iterum sumendi eam: hoc mandatum accepti a Patre meo.*' [No one takes it from Me, but I lay it (i.e. My life) down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again. This command I have received from my father] (John 10. 18). In the Alexandrian *Physiologus* a direct correlation is made between Christ's resurrection and the bird as a symbol: 'The Lord said in the Gospel, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again," and the Jews were vexed by the word. There is a bird in India called Phoenix. Every 500 years it comes to the forests of Lebanon and fills its wings with spices, and signals to the priest of Heliopolis on the new month ... [who] fills the altar with vine-wood.'<sup>97</sup> The bird comes to the altar and incinerates itself, and the next day the priest finds the chick of the bird. By the time of Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* the phoenix symbolises the power of Christ to come back to life:

Trewly she was, to myn ye,  
The soley fenix of arabye;  
For ther livyth never but oon,  
Ne swich as she ne knowe I noon<sup>98</sup>

Inevitably such symbolism has variations. In *Pearl*, for example, the poet regards the bird as one of God's immaculate creations, unique, though evidently like the Virgin:

<sup>97</sup> Cited in trans. by Grant 1999 *op cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>98</sup> Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, Third Edition, ed. by Larry D. Benson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 981 – 984.

Now, for synglerty o hyr dousour,  
 We calle hyr Fenyx of Arraby,  
 þat freles fle3e of hyr fasor  
 Lyk to þe Quen of cortaysye.<sup>99</sup>

From being a relatively obscure symbol the bird takes on new Christian symbolic meanings and allegorical value, in the example of *Pearl*, extending to the cult of the Virgin, from Christ Her son. However, this symbolism speaks of a need to explain and illustrate an occurrence in a way that scripture does not do. Indeed Porphyry highlights what had become a stock objection to the divinity of Jesus, namely that divinity is susceptible of proof and that at the point where such proof might have been expected, Jesus produces none. The point, for Porphyry is that if apotheosis, in this case the sublime quality of the deification story, is the hallmark of divinity, then only Classic figures such as Asklepios, Herakles, and Dionysus are worthy of reverence, owing to the greater antiquity of their stories. Of course, there is a distinction to be made here. In his rigorously logical appraisal of the crucifixion Porphyry requires textual evidence of its philosophical basis, while Paul encourages men to have faith on the basis of an as yet unwritten mysticism. Charles Freeman explains that ‘Plato specifically condemned faith as a means of finding the truth; for him the only secure way of understanding the immaterial world was through the use of reason. Although there is no evidence that Paul knew of Plato’s thought, we can assume that he realised that his concept of ‘faith’ was vulnerable when set against the mainstream of the Greek intellectual tradition.’<sup>100</sup> In contrast Paul asks that the proof of his text be seen as comprising a straight forward exegesis - that oracular proof is valid proof of the resurrection. However, the fragmented narratives of the Gospels offer only inconsistencies for Porphyry, inviting philosophical criticism because they contain within them the seeds of alternative positions. In a very different context Alan Sinfield remarks that ‘all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of alternative

<sup>99</sup> Gawain - poet, *Pearl*, in *The Poems of the Pearl manuscript: Pearl, Cleaness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, York Medieval Texts., 2nd series (London : Edward Arnold, 1979) 249 - 32.

<sup>100</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, p. 119.

stories they try to exclude.’<sup>101</sup> Similarly for Porphyry, such inconsistencies suggest that Paul is trying to hide something. While Paul asserts that his reading is the only reading, this is ironic and inconsistent for Porphyry because Paul says both that God is revealed by holy scriptures and manifest in Christ and that any other view which denies this is false *and* that his authority is his own experience, and that his word alone is authoritative:

*Miror quod sic tam cito transferimini ab eo qui vos vocavit in gratiam Christi in aliud evangelium; quod non est aliud, nisi sunt aliqui qui vos conturbant, et volunt convertere evangelium Christi. Sed licet nos aut angelos de caelo evangelizet vobis praeterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit.*

(Gal. 1. 6 - 8)

Let me warn you, Paul tells the Galatians, that if anyone advocates a version of the gospel different from the one I have preached to you, he should be condemned. While for Porphyry other accounts of Jesus’ life are already inconsistent, Paul seems to confirm that they are there to confuse the truth. As discussed above, Paul is desperately afraid of losing what authority he has already gained, and because of this Porphyry sees the texts as stories: ‘The evangelists were fiction writers and are not observers or eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. Each of the four contradicts the other in writing his account of the events of his suffering and crucifixion’ (AC p. 32). Characteristically, Porphyry maintains throughout his arguments that reason has been abandoned by Christians, in favour of a faith that is nothing less than hysterical. His account of Paul’s reading of Romans (7. 12 – 14) illustrates this in relation to the idea of the superiority of the new law over the old – a point on which Paul’s teaching are indeed contradictory:

Paul next turns around like a man startled awake by a night-mare, screaming,  
“I Paul, testify that if a man keeps any bit of the law then he is indebted to the

<sup>101</sup> Alan Sinfield, ‘Cultural Materialism, *Othello*, and the Politics of Plausibility’ in Rivkin. J. & R. Ryan, eds. *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 1998) p. 819.

whole law". He says this rather than simply asserting that it is wrong to keep the commandments set down in the law.

A man whose intellectual powers are worthy of admiration – one instructed in the specifics of the law of his fathers, one who frequently invokes the authority of Moses – is also one, it seems, so sotted with wine that his wits have abandoned him

(AC pp. 61 - 62).

The view of Paul that God is manifest in Christ, and that any other view which denies this is false, is problematic once 'evidence' for the statement is removed.

*Notum enim vobis facio, fratres, evangelium quod evangelizatum est a me, quia non est secundum hominem; neque enim ego ad hominem accepi illud, neque didici, sed per revelationem Iesu Christi.* [But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received *it* from man, nor was I taught *it*, but it *came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.]

(Gal: 1. 11 – 12)

Paul explains that the Gospel proclaimed by himself is not of human origin, because he did not receive it from a human source, nor was he taught it, but received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. He emphasises that the Gospel he preaches is revelatory, and directly from Christ and not through the disciples, despite the fact that he has had every opportunity to follow Christ's teachings directly from them. Paul stresses that faith in Christ does not involve any kind of identification with Jesus as a man, but has validity only in his crucifixion, death and resurrection. Charles Freeman has commented that Paul's emphasis demonstrates that, because others speak with much greater authority of Jesus' life, Paul 'feels he has to carve out a distinct area of expertise where he has scope to develop a theology that is not dependent on knowledge of Jesus' life on earth?'<sup>102</sup> Indeed, in *On True Religion* Augustine showed an awareness of the difference between the Porphyrian position and that of Paul. In

<sup>102</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, p. 112.

his awareness of Porphyry's empiricism, coupled with his awareness of the need for historical facts necessarily reported in scripture by others who experience them, Augustine saw that the difference between philosophical and revealed religion was a difference between reason and faith.<sup>103</sup>

Porphyry's critique of the resurrection of the flesh focuses closely on John's account of the events of the three days following the crucifixion. In his commentary on John's account of the crucifixion in his Gospel, Porphyry states that:

it is clear that these addled legends are lifted from accounts of several crucifixions or based on the words of someone who died twice and did not leave a strong impression of his suffering and death to [*sic*] those present. [It follows that] these men were unable to be consistent with respect to the way he died, basing [their account] simply on hearsay, then they did not fare any better with the rest of their story.

(AC p. 33).

Porphyry directly attacks John's account of the crucifixion: 'no wonder John is so anxious to swear the truthfulness of his account, saying, "He that saw it testifies to it - and we know his testimony is true." ' (AC p. 34; citing '*Et qui vidit testimonium perhibuit, et verum est testimonium eius, et ille scit quia vera dicit, ut et vos creditatis*' [And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe] John 19. 35). The essence of Porphyry's argument here is that John's statement 'He that saw it testifies to it - and we know his testimony is true' refers to no-one but John himself, and is an uncorroborated, self - referential testimony. Seeing the Christian martyrdom to be based upon fabricated 'fairy tales' (AC p. 35), Porphyry takes the silence of the other three gospel writers as evidence that the events described by John did not happen. Self - referential evidence is much too simplistic: 'the truth is not to be sought by looking for facts in syllables and letters' says Porphyry (AC p. 33), his logic being based merely on the empirical assumption that 'an event like the resurrection, while not in

<sup>103</sup> M. T. Clarke *op cit.*, P 10.

itself impossible, demands credible witnesses – “men of high renown” – whereas the Christian record in the gospels introduces witnesses whose reports are dubious, coming as they do from the lowest strata of society.’ (AC p. 34).

Seeing John’s Gospel as an implausible account he asks for evidence from ‘your record’ of the ‘other world.’ Porphyry was well known for his attack on the Gnostic idea that the world was separate from God, and inherently bad. He is uncomfortable with Paul’s statement that the form [*skēma*] of the world is passing away,<sup>104</sup> and he very perceptively isolates the Gnostic tendencies of John’s gospel, in this case: ‘*Nunc iudicium est mundi, nunc princeps huius mundi eiicietur foras; et ego, si exultatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad me ipsum*’ [Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself] (John 12. 31 - 32). Asking for a philosophical clarification about the ‘other world’ indicates his awareness that John’s statement implies God’s innate separatism, and therefore eagerness to escape from creation, which would fundamentally conflict with the non-dualistic Christian thought in which God both encompasses, and is a part of, the material world. In these terms God cannot be cast out of everything which is at once himself:

Tell me, for heaven’s sake, what sort of judgment is this supposed to be – and just who is the “ruler” who is being cast outside? If you say “The emperor [is the ruler],” I say that there is no single world ruler – as many have power in the world – and none have been “cast down.” If, on the other hand, you mean someone who is not flesh and blood but an immortal, then where would he be thrown? Where is this invisible world ruler to go outside the world he rules? Show us from your record. If there isn’t another world for this ruler to go to – and it is impossible for there to be two such worlds – then where other than to the world he’s to be expelled *can* he go?

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<sup>104</sup> ‘*et qui utuntur hoc mundo tamquam non utantur: praeterit enim figura huius mundi*’ (1 Cor. 7. 31). in contrast Hoffman *ibid.*, cites *Enn.* 2. 10, 13 as an example of the anti-gnosticism of Plotinus and Porphyry: ‘How can anyone [viz., the “Gnostics”] deny that [the world] is a clear image, beautifully formed, of the Intellectual Divinities? p. 67(n).

One cannot be cast out of what he is already in. Unless of course you are thinking in terms of a clay pot which, when broken, spills its contents not into oblivion but into the air or the earth.'

(AC p. 35).

Porphry understands John's gospel as an article informing men that creation should be escaped, while providing no philosophical basis for how this is to be understood. John treats Christ as though he was unborn into the material world, incorporeal and without form: a man in appearance only. This is, for Porphyry, a rejection of the material world as separate from God, and fundamentally bad. However, Christianity is non-dualistic, as Porphyry realises, and early Christianity's view overwhelmingly a theocentric one, where God is seen to be in all things. Porphyry's argument in *On Abstinence* is that animals should not be consumed because of the divine within them. Indeed, without a fundamentally theocentric view of creation, animals would in no way be a sign for God because there would be no direct line between their reality and interpreting Him.<sup>105</sup> Such an attack on narrative credibility extends to a critique of biblical hyperbole, which is often used in conjunction with negative terminology. The focus on hyperbole 'was a feature of the quarrel between pagan culture and Christian teaching from its beginning, and a trademark of the Greek and Latin rhetoric in which the argument was conducted.'<sup>106</sup> Porphyry uses the example of Jesus casting the demons into swine to show how differing accounts are not only exaggerated but contradictory: 'It is Matthew who is probably guilty of the greater exaggeration, turning Mark's single demoniac into two possessed men. Matthew specifies a "large number" of swine, where Mark gives "about two thousand" – a little less than half the number required to accommodate a legion of demons.' (AC p. 39). This is 'an offence to reason' for Porphyry because Christ has not actually cast the demons out – merely transferred them from one element of creation into another:

If the story is true and not some fable (as we hold it to be), what does it say about Christ, that he permitted the demons to continue to do harm by driving

<sup>105</sup> Discussed in detail below, 3. 2 (c).

<sup>106</sup> Hoffman *op cit.*, p. 7.



them out of one man and into some poor pigs? ... [it is] odd that someone who alleges to have come into the world to patch up the harm [done by the evil one] to all mankind should limit himself to helping out just one. To free only one man from spiritual bondage [of sin] and not two, or three, or thirteen, or everyone ... a reasonable person, upon hearing such a tale, instinctively makes up his mind as to the truthfulness of the story; he says something like, "if Christ does not do his good for the benefit of everyone under the sun, but only relocates the evil by driving it from place to place, and if he takes care of some and neglects others – well, then, what good is he as a saviour?" By this sort of action, he who is saved only makes life impossible from someone else who is not, so that the unsaved stand to accuse those who are saved.

(*AC* pp. 42 - 43).

The exclusivity of helping the individual alone and not all men and things 'under the sun' is a problem for Porphyry, not least of all because it is a fundamental rejection of the divine within creation. The individuated Christian ontology in which man has a closed and personal relationship with God, who aids him to escape an evil or corrupted world, is too humanocentric, and the casting out of the demons into the things of that world overemphasises the importance of man alone. The pigs, though not human beings, and with no immortal souls, are treated as irrational creatures solely for man's use, and in terms of Porphyry's broader argument, this is far too Gnostic. For Porphyry, rather, the Creator has a relationship with his dynamic creation which cannot be delimited to man alone. The interests of nature and variety of its valuable things should be seen as analogous to that of other - human - beings as breathing things filled with the spirit of soul or *Nous* of the One. In Christian terms, granting animals such a fundamental privilege would be to accept that they can be wronged - indeed that God can be wronged in His good world. The anti-Gnostic subtext here is that mistreating creation is mistreating God, or as Andrew Linzey puts it we should conceptualise what is 'owed animals as a matter of justice by virtue of their creator's right. Animals can be wronged because their Creator can be wronged in

his creation.’<sup>107</sup> From the point of view of the *Givenness* of created reality, God cannot really be indifferent to creation, and man’s (or in this case Jesus’) stewardship should consist in exercising special protection over all God’s things. From this perspective, man should witness the covenant relationship in a way that John and Paul never do.<sup>108</sup> However, here too, Porphyry’s problem is with the rhetoric of faith over the language of reason; how much is man *really* like God without his reason? Unquestioning faith, based on a belief in inconsistent narratives, might make men like beasts in their irrationality - in fact like the pigs who are the mistreated things of God’s creation.

Porphyry’s critique of Christian exegesis should be seen in the context of its sponsorship by the state to the detriment of its main competitor, Neoplatonism. Hellenic reason and Neoplatonic moral values are not, in Paul’s thought, given any consideration. In response, Porphyry is critical about the spiritual ‘norms’ which Paul prescribes, seeing them as religious stories, which are formulated as if they had no antecedents. He sees Romans 13 as consistent with the attempts to construct narratives closed to the contingency of a range of positions: it is an exclusivity which both isolates Paul’s teaching from the majority of men, but which also has a political agenda in aiming to assure that his version of Christianity is compatible with the dominant imperial Roman culture. In his letter to the Romans Paul states:

*Omnis anima potestatibus sublimioribus subdita sit, non est enim potestas nisi a deo; quae autem sunt, a Deo ordinatae sunt. Itaque qui resistit potestati, Dei ordinationi resistit; qui autem resistant, ipsi sibi damnationem acquirunt. Nam principes non sunt timori boni operas, sed mali. Vis autem non timere potestatem? Bonum fac, et habebis laudem ex illa; dei enim minister est tibi in bonum. Si autem malum feceris, time; non enim sine causa gladium portat:*

<sup>107</sup> Linzey, A., & Regan, T., trans. and eds., *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 135.

<sup>108</sup> God remembers the covenant which is between Himself and all animals: ‘*et recordabor [sic] foederis mei vobiscum, et cum omni anima vivente quae carnem vegetat*’ (Gen. 9. 15), and promises a covenant with the animal to abolish slaughter and bring it to salvation: ‘*Et percutiam cum eis foedus in die illa, cum bestia agri et cum volucre caeli et cum reptili terrae; et arcum et gladium et bellum conteram de terra, et dormire eos faciam fiducialiter*’ (Hos. 2. 18).

*Dei enim minister est, vindex in iram ei qui malum agit. Ideo necessitate subditi estote, non solum propter iram, sed etiam propter conscientiam. Ideo enim et tributa praestatis; ministrae enim Dei sunt in hoc ipsum servientes.*

[Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.]

(Rom. 13. 1 - 6).

Paul explains that every person should submit to the subjection of the governing authorities because their authority is instituted from God, and whoever resists that authority resists what God has appointed and will incur judgement. Rulers should be seen not as a terror to good, but as judges of the bad: authority is God's servant for the good of man, and wrong-doers should fear the sword of authority, which will execute wrath on them. Because earthly authority exists by the appointment of God taxes must be paid. Religious practice here is based upon a set of beliefs manipulated by Paul, to help instil obedience and respect for authority. His text typifies the composition of a master narrative which implicitly involves the state and temporal power as a function of God's judgement on earth, cleverly implicating the reader in the text. Indeed, the Christian judiciary tradition subsequently claims that government is essentially just because it is divinely appointed, based on divine law. Earthly government must imitate God's government of nature because 'man needs someone capable of opening up the way to heavenly bliss through his conformity, here on earth, to what is *honestum*.'<sup>109</sup> Porphyry states:

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<sup>109</sup> Carrette., *op cit.*, p. 146.

We may conclude that Paul is a liar. He is the adopted brother of everything false, so that it is useless for him to declaim, "I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie" [Rom. 9. 11]; for a man who one day uses the law as his rule and the next day uses the gospel is either a knave or a fool in what he does in the sight of others and even when hidden away by himself.

(AC pp. 60 - 61)

Porphyry sees that Paul combines political and spiritual discourses in articulating a power structure, which then necessarily involves the state in spiritual mediation. However conscious or unconscious such an adaptation may be, the criteria of spiritual objectivity are lost as they are made to fit the system's interests:

The same man who writes, "The law is spiritual" to the Romans, and "The law is holy and the commandment holy and just" now puts a curse upon those who obey what is holy! Then, as if to confuse the point further, he turns everything around and throws a fog so dense that anyone trying to follow him inevitably gets lost, bumping up against the gospel on the one side, against the law on the other, stumbling over the law and tripping over the gospel – all because the guide who leads them by the hand has no idea where he is headed!

(AC p. 62).

Again, Macarius' answer to Porphyry's objections is that 'law' is an allegorical application of an Old Testament prototype, and is 'spiritual' or 'holy' when interpreted in the light of Christ's coming. Macarius ignores Porphyry's criticism that the doctrine of salvation of John and Paul not merely excludes all men from coming to God, but all creation: 'Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake.' (AC p. 62). Macarius perpetuates the humanocentric notion that God cares only for men, and that those who have earthly authority must, by some logic, have been granted it by God as mediator of his care and judgment. For Macarius the *Authentici*, or Biblical writers establish a fixed spiritual ideal. But the juristic tradition of the state is *legitimised* by the religious

tradition of the Church in a trinity of medieval world powers, *studium*, *imperium*, *sacerdotium* within which the *Disputatores* are the officially and divinely sanctioned authors of prescriptive discourses.

## 1. 6 Summary

Such radically different approaches to interpreting the animal result in a discursive battleground, where competing ideologies debate the relative validity of textual authorities in deciding spiritual truth. Authority, however, must be seen in conjunction with the ideological norms defined by the dominant political power, and competing spiritual and religious systems and practices. Paul developed a theology within which faith in the death and resurrection of Christ could dissolve the barrier between Jew and Christian, and the Old Testament law be superseded. Rituals such as circumcision, and the dietary restrictions of Exodus and Leviticus, would no longer be of importance. Paul's conviction that the Old Testament laws about the sacrifice and consumption of animals were obsolete, based upon the change of dietary prescription after the flood, is merely interpretative; it is a strange logic upon which he attempts to persuade Jews that they could and should eat what had been previously forbidden, in the light of Christ's coming. Paul also refers disparagingly to Christian vegetarians at Rome, saying that one who believes may eat what he likes, yet vegetarians are weak of faith: '*Infirmum autem in fide assumite, non in disceptationibus cogitationum. Alius enim credit se manducare omni; qui autem infirmus est olus manducut.*' (Rom. 14. 1 - 2). Paul effectively asks Jews and vegetarians to justify *not* eating certain or all animals. This begs an outstanding question: why should they justify what they do not do? Paul wanted to unify the church, not describe varieties of Christian practices and understandings, 'make for peace and build up the common life' he says to the Romans (14. 19). As Porphyry observes, this sounds suspiciously as though he is trying to make his theology compatible with the existing cultural practices of imperial Rome. Paul states that whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement (Rom. 13:1). Porphyry's response is that 'the same

man who writes, “The law is spiritual” to the Romans, and “The law is holy and the commandment holy and just” now puts a curse upon those who obey what is holy!’ (AC. P. 62). Porphyry sees that the Law of which Paul speaks is, by his own words, also Rome itself. In contrast Porphyry assumes no divine authority, only a logic aided by the received precepts of philosophy. His conclusions, rather than preceding their inscription find validity ‘through a confutation derived from an argumentative discussion.’ (ABST. 1. 1) They are a product of writing, speaking, and reading: a result rather than primarily a constituent of representation. For Porphyry the spiritual journey is one of self - enquiry and personal responsibility. Spiritual value, for him, lies in individual realisation of philosophical truth through experience. Coming to realise that ‘a fleshless diet contributed both to health and to the proper endurance of philosophical labours’ (ABST. 1. 2) involves the practice of ethics, not just by the belief in words. Faith or belief in the Prime Mover, for Porphyry, must be informed by what is right, not by a subjective utterance which seeks to inform an audience of beliefs empty and useless to spiritual progress. Knowledge, in other words, has no significance unless it is transformative. Accepting Christian doctrine through Paul, for example, is in Porphyry’s eyes fruitless because it offers only the abdication of personal responsibility to an official creed and an automatic fealty to received ideas.

Porphyry’s opposition to the Christian theology typified by Paul’s letters presents a voice of dissent to the prevailing norm. *Against the Christians* is heretical, but it is also too difficult to control, offering too precise a textual pathology for the comfort of the new religion. In the process *On Abstinence* is occluded because all of Porphyry’s works are seen as heretical. When Porphyry’s works becomes acceptable, *On Abstinence* clearly does not conform to dominant Roman cultural practices, or Paul’s interpretation of Christian theology. Indeed, its acceptance would compromise the classification of boundaries of human and non-human in Christian thought, which are presented as the only plausible means of defining the human self, and inform an individual agency which can not renounce the religion of the state which polices and protects its ‘meanings.’<sup>110</sup> An incompatible Hellenic knowledge is clearly censored

<sup>110</sup> By the eleventh century the structure of government ‘began to develop which gave the papacy and the hierarchy of the church, between the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and the reformation, a coercive power unique in the history of Christendom. This coercive power presupposed a machinery of government and group

from Christian thought, in part because its observations subvert Christian doctrine by revealing the inadequacy of officially approved, theologically sanctioned boundaries. For Foucault transgression is the interrogation of boundaries, 'a realm, no doubt, where what is in question is the limit rather than the identity of culture.'<sup>111</sup> But Foucault also sees that the biblical text and its interpretation provided the ultimate source of an authority informing those who read, prospered by it, and believed in it. He observes that the history of ideas

deals with the field of discourses as a dominant with two halves; any element located there may be characterised as old or new: traditional or original; conforming or deviant.<sup>112</sup>

He categorises two formulations; the ordinary, everyday idea is not responsible for itself, going 'so far as to repeat it word for word, from what has already been said',<sup>113</sup> characterised by inertia and the slow accumulation of the past. Alternatively, original ideas are highly valued and rare and have no similar antecedents, serving as a model for others. They constitute successive ruptures, the progression of thought, and facilitate the emergence of future discourses.

Questionable margins are identifiable as 'ruptures' in this way, and in Middle English literature, borders are always the sites of the most powerful symbolic repertoires where identity itself is inseparable from limits, and where existence out - runs definition. As I discuss below this can be seen in the hybrid humans of the *Animalibus* of Bartholomaeus who are safely 'other', always defined by lust, carnal desires, and as rapists of human woman. It is 'always a boundary phenomenon and its order is

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of people in need of coercion. Throughout the early Middle Ages the church had been a strong authoritarian. At various times the exigencies of a missionary church had compelled the toleration of Paganism; but this was dropped as soon as conveniently possible, and the same tolerance was rarely extended to Christian heretics. Bishops and secular rulers worked closely together for the control of men's souls as well as their bodies. Muslim traders were accepted, Jewish inhabitants of Christendom tolerated and even protected; but apostasy was condemned.' See Joan Evans, ed., *The Flowering of The Middle Ages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966) p. 32.

<sup>111</sup> P. Stallybrass & A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen and Co., 1986) p. 200.

<sup>112</sup> Foucault *op cit.*, 1972, p. 141.

<sup>113</sup> Foucault *ibid.*, p. 141 - 142.

always constructed around the figures of its territorial edge.’<sup>114</sup> The centre is always in animated discourse with the periphery, only maintaining its identity through this defining activity. Speaking of such boundaries Dorothy Yamamoto observes that:

any ordered system means that there must be boundaries between the different categories – the sort of demarcation visually expressed in tiers of animals shown in some of the illuminations of creation. Where there are boundaries, and border – line areas there is always a danger of frontiers being crossed and categories being mixed, with formless or hybridisation the result. The bestiary text is concerned with this kind of liminality. Since it presents a model of total orderliness, incorporating stability of habitat as well as stability of form, its anxiety over creatures who breach the boundaries sometimes appears as repudiation of the areas in which they live – which are described as physically marginal, neither one thing nor the other.<sup>115</sup>

Correspondingly, Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *DPR* articulates a structure which collates information, and assigns it to rigid categorisation. Such structures influence and inform western civilisation; indeed the control of thought - power itself - is comprised of instruments for the formation of recording knowledge. Encyclopaedia, *compilatio* and *commentatio* constitute methods of observation, registration, procedures for investigation, which are all apparatus of control. The ‘objective’ method of observation and registration is specifically designed to *inform*. As such it is a teaching apparatus for Christian morality, which is obedient to such forms of control. Again, Foucault makes the observation that:

From antiquity to Christianity, we pass from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality of obedience to a system of rules. And if I was interested in antiquity it was because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now

<sup>114</sup> Stallybrass *et al.*, *op cit.*, pp. 20, 200.

<sup>115</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 30.



disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, *the search for an ethics of existence.*<sup>116</sup>

Personal ethics through Christian 'truth', is an interpreted, fixed vision forcing 'obedience to a system of rules.' Correspondingly and ethically, animals in the text stand not only for themselves, but for individuals whose moral agency is prescribed by 'norms' of Christian definition which serve, for the most part, as the controlling agent of dominant state power. To ask why animals need suffer as the hapless victims of man's fall from grace is to ask why anyone subjected to the authoritative claims and actions of another upon them, need suffer? 'Thus dumb animals and "brute beasts" carry out recognisable "Christ - like" functions as they sacrifice themselves for the sake of an endangered and sinful humanity.'<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> M. Foucault, in McHoul. A. & Grove. W., eds., *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993) p. 118.

<sup>117</sup> Foucault 1993, *ibid.*, p. 64.

## CHAPTER 2

THE PLACEMENT OF THE ANIMAL AT THE LITERAL SENSE IN  
BARTHOLOMAEUS ANGLICUS' *DE PROPRIETATIBUS RERUM*

*... the literal sense must always come first as that which contains in its meaning (sentenza) all other meanings ... as the philosopher [Aristotle] says in the first book of the Physics, nature wishes us to proceed with due order in our acquiring of knowledge: that is, by proceeding from that which we know better to that which we know less well.*

Dante<sup>118</sup>

*[Preachers] should know the natures of animals and also of other things, because there is nothing which moves the hearts of an audience more than the properties of animals and of other things.*

Thomas of Chobham (d.1236)<sup>119</sup>

## 2. 1 *De proprietatibus rerum*

Porphyry's outward looking attitude to the animal stands in stark contrast to the closed matrix of interpretation which can be seen to characterise the medieval period, where the book of creation and its replica the text is read through a fideistically enclosed meaning system.<sup>120</sup> Prescribed by Augustine and scripture, the injunction that faith must come first if understanding is to follow '*si non credideritis, non permanebitis*' [if you do not believe you will not be established] (Isaiah 7. 9) is taken seriously. As

<sup>118</sup> Dante, *Il Convivio* cited in Minnis & Scott *op cit.*, p. 397.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas of Chobham, *Summa de arte praedicandi* extracted from D. L. D'Avery, ed. & trans., *The preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 232.

<sup>120</sup> The title and subject matter of Charles Freeman's *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason*, *op cit.*, retains this concept, and traces the exclusion of Hellenic reason and openness of thought by the dominant mysticism and faith of early Christianity.

already observed, such pre-existent faith would suggest that Christian doctrine supplies the enquirer with predetermined answers, thus dismissing the importance of the animal if that doctrinal answer already assumes its unimportance. Etienne Gilson explains that

In their [the church fathers'] mind faith was essential. The formula "The Platonism of the Fathers" would lead to an absurd interpretation if it were meant to say that the fathers were Platonists. They were essentially Christians, that is to say, teachers of a doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and not at all the disciples of a philosopher who conceived salvation as a natural reward for the philosophical exercise of reason ... one does not understand in order to believe, but on the contrary, one believes in order to understand: *neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam*. Understanding of faith, in short, presupposes faith.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the influence of Porphyry's Neoplatonic rationalism on Augustine and the early church, faith becomes a uniquely Christian way to find salvation. Equally, Neoplatonic positions on the status of the animal are excluded from Christian thought in favour of other authorities such as Augustine, Isidore, and Dionysius the Areopagite (6<sup>th</sup> century) who constitute the doctrine behind belief and faith in *De proprietatibus rerum*.<sup>122</sup> A faith based on the doctrinal understandings and interpretation of, for example Augustine, will inevitably see the status and meaning of the animal through his eyes, so that interpreting the animal results in a predetermined, doctrinal answer. There are, of course, other forms of such 'closure' and, as I discuss below, Augustine's *Logocentrism* is perhaps the most influential in this period. This too, however, requires that the enquirer turn to God for a divine illumination which would seem dependent upon the individual belonging to a faith which dismisses the value of the animal before it approaches 'knowledge' in the form of a creation ordered according to doctrine. In this way turning animals into texts forces physical bodies to

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<sup>121</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955) pp. 93, 129.

<sup>122</sup> See Brockhurst *op cit.*, p. 38 ff.

conform to the notion of a regimented creation. They become available to be read in the intricate world laid out as a book. Bartholomaeus Anglicus' encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum* presents such a version of the world, which is comprehensively ordered by categories to allow easy reference for students and clerics alike.<sup>123</sup> As a literal sense 'scientific' text it has no commentary from its compiler, rather bringing together a range of authoritative accounts and statements on each of its subjects. Book eighteen of the *DPR* - *De animalibus* - is a bestiary, having one hundred and seventeen entries on a range of animals, with the two notable exceptions of chapter thirty-two (*De cornu*) and chapter forty-nine (*De femina*).<sup>124</sup> As such, it provides a cross section of the way that the animal, and each animal in particular, is understood by a Franciscan scholar in the early scholastic period. This chapter will examine the way the animal is defined by Aristotelian notions of category. It will also observe that there are Christian doctrinal understandings, which allow the animal to constitute a comprehensively meaningful sign to medieval semiotics. Such a reading reveals the problems inherent in synthesising Aristotelian categorisation with Christian hierarchies, and we must be prepared to perceive the meaning of the animal in medieval thought through the way it is misunderstood, and the way it is displaced.

Bartholomaeus Anglicus was born in the late twelfth - century in Norfolk. He was educated as a Franciscan at the Paris *studium* around the year 1224 where the appellation 'Englishman' seems to have been bestowed upon him by students of other nationality.<sup>125</sup> It is known that Bartholomaeus became *lector* or lecturer of texts at the Paris Franciscan School as well as sixth 'minister provincial' of Saxonia in 1262.<sup>126</sup> Between his time at the *studium* and his post in Saxonia he wrote the *DPR* - most

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<sup>123</sup> D. C. Greetham's article on Bartholomaeus deals comprehensively with apparent inconsistencies caused by the appropriation of classical fable material, as well as the other influences which seem to dictate his textual approach: 'Isidore's theory, with its sense of a real, as well as metaphorical, link between two areas of experience (the world itself and the words used to describe that world), is, of course, very attractive to Bartholomaeus and provides him not only with much incidental material but also with a further justification for the rationale of his own work.' Greetham *op cit.*, p. 674 (n).

<sup>124</sup> See appendix C, 'The placement and displacement of the feminine in Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*.

<sup>125</sup> See *NCE* Vol. 2. p. 131 *a.* M. C. Seymour's account varies in details about Bartholomaeus' earlier origins and movements. M. C. Seymour, ed., *Bartholomaeus Anglicus and His Encyclopaedia*, (Oxford: Varorium, 1992).

<sup>126</sup> Seymour *op cit.*, p. 22.

probably around 1245 while still *lector* at Magdeburg. The *DPR* is his most notable work and is the largest and most comprehensive work of its type. It comprises the encyclopaedic categorisation of known creation into a Latin *compilatio* designed both for use with the technique of scholastic *Lectio*, and as a reference text for scholarly clerics.<sup>127</sup> The Middle English form of the *DPR*, John Trevisa's translation of 1398, is a prime example of a vernacular *summa*, its conventions arising directly from the original. As Trevisa's version is the best known and most used by English writers it is this translation from which I work.<sup>128</sup>

The *DPR* was extremely influential, perhaps because it is the most practical and comprehensive of its type. Its immediately obvious inspiration and source is Isidore of Seville's attempt to compile an encyclopaedia of all human knowledge in his *Etymologies*. However, taking his authorities from a wide range of earlier works, and with access to a larger body of sources and analogues, means that Bartholomaeus' compilation easily rivals Isidore's work in size and complexity. It constitutes an encyclopaedia of theology and science arranged in nineteen books: a unified and comprehensible statement of 'universal' knowledge as understood by its author. The material of the *DPR* is presented in relation to scripture interpreted by Augustine, and comprising Aristotelian learning in the natural sciences available through new Arabic and Jewish scholarship permeating the west such as Aristotle's *Parts of Animals*, *Physica* and *Metaphysica*, which were admitted to the curriculum early in the thirteenth century.<sup>129</sup>

The importance of the influx of new ideas in the early twelfth - century, what became known as 'new Aristotelianism', cannot be exaggerated. The old and new dialectic of

<sup>127</sup> See appendix D '*De proprietatibus rerum: lectio* as context'

<sup>128</sup> Lawler p. 268 ff.

<sup>129</sup> Bartholomaeus refers often to 'Austyn,' first at book one, (*DPR* 1. 25) The sources for Bartholomaeus use of Augustine are *De genesi ad litteram* and *De civitate dei*. If the twelfth century was in essence Augustinian, Isidore produced the substance of its prevailing philosophy, in *Tres libri sententiarum*. Drawn in the most part from Augustine, it preceded many similar works of the twelfth century. Seymour observes that 'The general intellectual patterns of *De proprietatibus rerum* are thus clear: the Augustinian orthodoxy of its cohesive theology, the reliance upon Aristotle alongside Pliny and Isidore ... and the modern colouring given to the work by the frequent citation of contemporary and twelfth century authorities.' Seymour *op cit.*, pp. 11, 27.

Aristotle (i.e. the *Organon* with the *Eisagōgē* of Porphyry) were read *ordinarie* as the prescribed curriculum.<sup>130</sup> E. R. Curtius pinpoints the advent of ‘new’ Aristotelian thought, seeing Thierry of Chartres’ *Heptateuchon* (1148) as the last great presentation of the old *artes liberales* system before the influx of new realms of knowledge from the East.<sup>131</sup> Only decades before the compiling of the *DPR* one of Bartholomaeus’ main authorities, the Arabic Aristotelian Averroes (1126 - 1198)<sup>132</sup> translated Aristotle’s natural history, *Ethics* and *Politics* from the Greek, and facilitated the widespread dissemination of Aristotle’s theory of poetry as laid out in the *Metaphysics* - the *Poetics* being as yet unknown. Not popular initially, Aristotelianism came to be accepted as a necessary bridge to the classical scholarship and logic absent from Christianity in the later Middle Ages. Etienne Gilson saw that ‘pagan’ philosophy provided an explanatory logic that complemented Christian Truths, being itself resolved by the transcendence which Christianity brings to it.<sup>133</sup> The synthesis of the two are evident in the early thirteenth - century’s appropriation of the ‘Aristotelian Prologue’ which became popular among arts faculty lecturers at the University of Paris as a sophisticated analytical framework for interpreting the world, but which could only be constituted at the literal level of the scientific text. The literal sense was thought essential to the two part speculative theology popular in the thirteenth century.<sup>134</sup> It was felt that faith in the Divine compelled the student to seek understanding through the explication of philosophical thought, accumulated examples of material ‘things’, and the description of those things through language. This was first possible by exposition and the organisation of theoretical material into texts. Secondly, the resultant texts were available for *theological reflection* and were meant to stimulate the deepest exigencies of the intelligence - the search for order and incorporation into logical design.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup> See Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. by F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, 3 Vols., (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1936) pp. 440 - 441.

<sup>131</sup> Curtius *op cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>132</sup> Averroes or Averroes (1126 - 1198) was a well - known contemporary Arab or ‘Moorish’ commentator on Aristotle.

<sup>133</sup> Gilson 1936 *op cit.*, see especially Chapter 2 of that work.

<sup>134</sup> For a detailed discussion see A. B. Cobban, *The Medieval Universities: Their Development and Organisation* (Methuen & Co. London, 1975) pp. 79 - 85.

<sup>135</sup> *NCE* Vol. 4. 954 b.

As a *compilatio*, the *DPR* is no exception to these modes and is meant to be understood in the literal sense, the scientific nature of the work being stated in the preface or *prohemium*.

By Cause herof I profre þis work to þe edificacioun of þe hous of our lord þat is God glorious and hy3e and blessed withouten ende. In þis werk me speketh and tretip of somme propirtees of kyndeliche þinges, of þe whiche þingis som is bodiliche and som not bodiliche ... þe propirtees of kyndeliche þinges beþ isommed and schortliche conteyned, as þe eeres þat scapide þe honos of ripemen my3te come to myne hondes. In þis work I haue iput of myne owne wille litil opir nou3t, but al þat schal be seid is itake of autentik bokes of holy seyntes and of philosophres and compile schortliche withoute idilnesse ...

(*Proh.* pp. 41 - 3).

The intention (*intentio*) of the author, his approach and level of discussion, and the interpretative strategy required by the reader is clearly stated. He indicates the primarily informational content of the work. Spiritual enlightenment is hoped for, but is of secondary consideration to the purpose of a text which bases its empiricism in the material. The primary function of the *DPR* is as an encyclopaedic aid to logic. The specific references to 'kyndeliche þingis' is important, because it informs us that Bartholomaeus will not engage with what things mean as signs, but document them as examples of creation for discussion and commentary elsewhere. Andrew Linzey comments that 'Scholasticism has for centuries regarded animals as "things." The consequence is unsurprising: animals have been treated as things.'<sup>136</sup> Such unsympathetic objectivity extends to the scientific mode of the text, in which Bartholomaeus follows the conventional literal sense topos of the *compiler* and passes no comment upon his subject matter. He states '[I]n þis work I haue iput of myne owne wille litil opir nou3t'; 'adding nothing out of my own head' is an idiom in which self-depreciation signifies the intention to be objective by disavowing

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<sup>136</sup> Linzey and Regan *op cit.*, p. 135.

responsibility for, and unwillingness to comment upon, the material he has compiled.<sup>137</sup> He will, in other words, describe the animal as it is reported, unquestioningly, and without passing comment or judgment on his sources' accounts of individual animals.

At first sight the *DPR* represents a synthesis of biblical knowledge and Aristotelian thought, though it is neither exclusively a theological or philosophical work. Book One reflects abstract ideas from books one to seven of Augustine's *De trinitate* and the understanding of what God has revealed to himself: 'þat al þing þat is seyð of God, it is *essentia* oþir *nocio* oþir *persona*' (*DPR* 1. 3). Focus is on the external trinity of the *thing* seen, the *process* of seeing, the *intention* of seeing that distinguishes *scientia* 'knowledge through senses' and *sapientia* or wisdom gained from the contemplation of 'eternal reality.'<sup>138</sup> In this way Bartholomaeus' aim to be scientific is clearly evident in his use of the literal mode, *and* in the care taken to justify the synthesis of science with the other literal mode of canonical scriptural authority, or in fact, God's word.

The literal sense was believed to represent the intention of the human *auctor* as expressed at the primary narrative level. The allegorical senses that involve significative things are of no use to the logician because he is confined to the literal sense. While the world presents a system of symbols open to interpretation as the work of God, only from the literal sense may valid argument be drawn. Aquinas reiterates Augustine's definition of *words* as signs of the earth and *things* as signs of heaven: God is the sole *auctor* of things and uses things as signs. Human authors are the '*auctors* of words and use words to signify ... when words are used significantly, we have the literal sense.'<sup>139</sup> And through the literal, the purpose of the *DPR* is its utility (*utilitas*), its final end (*finis*) the informing of students about the world and its 'things.'<sup>140</sup> But while the text provides a basis for meanings not apparent at the literal

<sup>137</sup> A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Latter Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1986) p. 199.

<sup>138</sup> Seymour *op cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>139</sup> Minnis 1986, *op cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>140</sup> Seymour observes that the sermons of Berthold Von Regensburg, *lector* between 1230 and 1234 at the Franciscan Convent of Regensburg, demonstrate the utilisation of *Proprietatibus* as it was intended, its animals being used as exemplars in sermon writing. Seymour *op cit.*, p. 33.



level, the book itself does not extend to allegorical or spiritual readings. The *DPR*, as its author has indicated in the *prohemium*, will present source material without commentary, its only prescription that ‘oure wit may not sti3e vnto þe contemplacioun of vnseye þinges’ until we have considered ‘þinges that bep iseye’ (*Proh.* p. 41), the reader should go no further than an acceptance of the authorities employed.

If Horace’s closely followed advice that the chief aim of the poet is ‘to instruct and delight’ - to do good *and* to give pleasure<sup>141</sup> - then the encyclopaedia might be said to inform, the greater emphasis of its *compiler* being on the informational content presented at the literal sense of the scientific text. As a scientific literal sense exposition of that which is already known, the animals of the *DPR* should pose little complication, the value of the text lying in objective or literal descriptions of the animals of creation, and the value of the animals themselves lying in their ability to reveal or signify some aspect of their creator. But it is wrong to ascribe absolute value to such a medieval collection of beasts. While Bartholomaeus claims to offer no interpretation or commentary, the animals of his bestiary offer a plethora of symbolic and allegorical readings which defy a literal sense categorisation in line with the structural hierarchy of substances which govern the text. In this respect what the animals represent could be operative at a multiple of levels, as signs both positive and negative, depending upon different contexts and attributes. As Bartholomaeus reports or describes animals which he has never seen, such as elephants, tigers and griffins, he is unaware that any objective account will still include the inbuilt symbolism bestowed on individual animals by this chosen authorities. This is evident to such an extent that reading the *DPR* as absolutely literal in its sense or *modus* is impossible. Subsequently, it seems reasonable to suggest that reading the *DPR* from Aristotelian and doctrinal modes of interpretation will provide much to be said about the way in which the animal is placed and understood in the Christian world.

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<sup>141</sup> Horace, ‘The Art of Poetry,’ in *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. by D. A. Russell & M. Winterbottom, Oxford World Classics Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 106.

## 2. 2 The substance of *De proprietatibus rerum*

The key to understanding how the animal is placed in the scholastic thought of the *DPR* lies in the understanding that ‘substance’ provides the principal structural premise of the text. The work presents the reader with a version of Aristotelian thought in which the animal is placed according to the universals of genus and species, though in the Christianised version of that Aristotelian structure, as evidenced in the *DPR*, the animal is clearly - if only cosmetically - displaced from its usual location in Aristotelian thought, by being apparently located at the very bottom of the list.<sup>142</sup> While operating upon the principle that universal substances provide definition of things, Bartholomaeus’ bestiary also disrupts the notion of such categories by providing the reader with examples of particularly medieval animals, including hybrids and fabulous beasts who have specific symbolic potential, pertinent to the medieval paradigm. In Trevisa’s rendering of Bartholomaeus’ preface, a comment is made about the way that things should be understood relative to their substance: ‘For þe propirtees of þinges folewyth þe substaunce, þe ordre and þe distinccioun of propirtees schal be ordeyned to ordir and distinccioun of þe substaunce þerof.’ (*Proh.* 41). What exactly does it mean to say that to find the properties of a thing you must know its substance? And how might an understanding of this statement facilitate a reading of the animals and mythical creatures of a text, which characterise ‘an age which was obsessed with classification, valuing the universal over the particular and the typical over the individual’?<sup>143</sup> Minnis’ statement is necessarily broad; theories change over time, and an alternative and inverted understanding of the universals is discussed below. As a general rule, however, the dominance of the universal over the particular may provide an approach to the structure of the *DPR* and to bring a reading to its bestiary, though it is first necessary to define how Bartholomaeus understands the principle, and in what way the animals of the bestiary conform to or subvert, the logical categorisation of scholastic thought. In turn the text can provide explanations

<sup>142</sup> See appendix C.

<sup>143</sup> Minnis 1986, *op cit.*, p. 2.

for other texts, such as those by Langland and Chaucer, who use *De proprietatibus rerum* as a source.

Bartholomaeus' literal level *compilatio* follows the Aristotelian premise that things can only be known by first establishing their substance (*substantia*). For Aristotle substance is primarily a being (*ousia*) and the things that qualify most as beings particular individual entities - *You* and *I* - are primary substances: 'this is just what we mean by the individual – the numerical one, and by the universal we mean that which is predicable of the individuals.'<sup>144</sup> A primary substance pertains to an individual alone: 'a substance - that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all - is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g. the individual man or the individual horse.'<sup>145</sup>

The purpose of Aristotle's focus on substance is to define the 'universal' (that which can be said to be universally true of a thing shared in relation to others of its type) by first focusing on a particular example. He states 'I call universal that which is by its nature predicated of a number of things, and particular that which is not; man, for instance, is a universal, Callius a particular.'<sup>146</sup> In this sense things are defined in relation to the types of substance to which they belong. Aristotle uses 'genus' and 'species' for any two consecutive levels of generality. Both 'man' and 'animal' are 'second' substances in that they are categorised by *genera* (i.e. animal) and his species (i.e. man). What is genus relative to a lower clause can be called a species relative to a higher one. 'Genus' signifies the 'kind' or the essence of a thing given by its definition, which in turn indicates what the thing really *is* in its first instance (*genus proximum*). Its specific difference is its species (*differentia specifica*). The most often used example in the debate on universals, offers the definition of human being, as a rational (specific difference) animal (the nearest kind).

<sup>144</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, ed. by Jonathon Barnes, Bollingen Series LXXI (London: Princeton University Press, 1985). 1000 a, 1.

<sup>145</sup> Aristotle, *Categories* 2 a, 11 – 14, in *Categories and Interpretation*, trans. by J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963).

<sup>146</sup> Aristotle *De Interpretatione* 17 a, 39 - 40, in *Categories and Interpretation*, *op cit*.

For Aristotle, only facts about secondary substances are scientifically knowable: a fact about an ‘individual’ human may be rational and appertains to you and me, but it appertains to our species and not to us as individuals. We are rational as human beings, not as John or Jane, *reason* giving the definition of man’s species being common as it is to other men: ‘that which is common [*koinon*] is present in many things at the same time; so that clearly no universals exist apart from the individual.’<sup>147</sup> By the logic of Aristotle’s empiricism only a fact which is necessarily true, existing in relation to others of their type, can be known scientifically. As we cannot know an individual scientifically we cannot, therefore, really know him at all. It is false to say that the essence of man has existence in singular because particular truths about particular individuals are too variable, and cannot be objects of scientific knowledge. If existence in singular pertained just in relation to man, man would never exist, except as a singular: ‘for no universal is a this, nor is it found at the same time ... It is what is found always and everywhere which we say is universal.’<sup>148</sup> In this sense all facts about individuals as ‘particulars’ are contingent.

When Bartholomaeus says that for the properties of things we must first find and understand their substance he refers directly to this understanding. He explains that singular examples of individual entities should be observed in order to categorise their *belonging* according to their properties, or in fact the things that commonly form their genus and species. Since all of the facts about individuals as individuals are contingent, the object and proper end of scientific knowledge for Aristotle are the facts about genera and species evidenced in singular examples, Bartholomaeus explains this first step to understanding the things of creation:

For it is not possible to oure witte to st3e vp to þe contemplacioun  
vnmaterial of þe ierarchies of heuen by material ledinge þat longith thereto  
... oure wit may not sti3e vnto þe contemplacioun of vnseye þinges but it  
be ilad by consideracioun of þinges þat beþ iseye

(*Proh.* 41)

<sup>147</sup> *Met.* 1040 b, 25 - 26.

<sup>148</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. by Jonathon Barnes, ed. by J. L. Ackrill & Lindsey Judson (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1994), 87 b, 32.

In a Christian milieu which takes as its authority ‘*Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*’ [For now we see in a glass darkly, though sometime face to face] (1 Cor 13. 12) Bartholomaeus states that creation reflects only veiled meanings which we *may* read, though they are an imperfect sign of God’s intention, and a bad reflection of ontological reality. But to begin to understand, we must first read the *particular* things of creation, ‘þinges þat beþ iseye’. Following Aristotle, Bartholomaeus’ intention is to establish the universally knowable facts about particular examples who will give definition, genera and species.

Correspondingly, Bartholomaeus’ title is *De proprietatibus rerum*, and not *De rebus*, and the subject of the book is ‘somme propertees of kyndeliche þinges ... in comun and in special’ (*Proh.* 41), not things themselves.<sup>149</sup> Thus the particular significance of individual animals is not the subject of the text. Rather, the ‘properties’ of his title are the things about concrete examples which facilitate classification. In the classification of the bestiary animals, as in man, existence precedes essence.

The first chapter of *De animalibus* offers an overview ‘in general’ of Aristotle’s definitions of the animal. Other authoritative commentaries on the denominative characteristics of each beast in particular are to be dealt with in the proceeding chapters on each particular animal ‘in special’ where the aim is to report and categorise particular things known about ‘*animal*, a beste’ (*DPR* 18. 1) one species to one chapter. This idea that truths about particular individuals cannot be objects of scientific knowledge is useful for categorisation but also irredeemably problematic resulting in the uncomfortable, if beautifully put, observation of the especially complicated duality of man’s status as a species of animal who, while essentially defined by his *Logos*, must primarily be defined in the corporeal context: ‘Isider seiþ þat a man is a best iliche to God ...’ (*DPR* 3. 1). In spite of himself man is inseparable from beasts: ‘3it for þe properties of man schulde be þe more opunliche iknowe to

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<sup>149</sup> i.e. shared and in particular. In its Middle English sense the word properties suggests the distinctive physical qualities, attributes or characteristics of a thing though in the Latin *proprietatibus* (*proprium* or ‘properties’) may be better rendered ‘distinguisher’ especially given the Quiditative approach to definitions of man, animal, plant, and their subsequent definition at each level by book and chapter of the text.

bestis-sche men and simple of his parties of þe which he is imaade and componed ...' (DPR 3. 1). Mankind, we are told, has quiddity, or defining characteristics, as an animal and at a biological level. Outside the delimitation of the *De animalibus* the animal, in other words, is always explained in relation to its highest point of definition - that of mankind and a superior intellect. But definition must start at the literal and with the beast-like or animal 'parts' which will in turn allow a better understanding of the beast in man, and bestial men. This dichotomy of the bestial and the reasonable, which becomes a doctrinal commonplace in Christian theology, is what Bartholomaeus refers to when he states that the 'animal' part of man (*Humo*) is of 'þe erþe' yet is also '*Antropos*' or 'arered vp' to face his God, plainly glossing Aristotle in *Parts of Animals*.<sup>150</sup>

opir bestis lokeþ donward to þe erþe, and God 3af to man an hi3e mouþ and hete hym loke vp and se heven, and he 3af to man visagis arerid toward þe stars. Also a man schal seche heven and nou3t putte his þou3t in þertþe and be obedient to þe wombe as a best. Isider spekeþ of double maner man, of þe inner man and vtter man.

(DPR 3. 1).

This 'double maner man' of both inner and outer parts has on the one hand 'soule' and reason or 'vnbodiliche substaunce intellectual'. Always bearing corporeal similarity to God his nature is to aspire to be more like God. Theologically, and no longer in a purely Aristotelian mode, Bartholomaeus wrongly extends Aristotle's thought into 'insensibles' placing man 'next afir angels' (DPR 3. 1)<sup>151</sup> thereby departing from Aristotelian structure to link man with his Christian God, through the doctrine that man is made in God's image, and may attain a status equivalent to that of angels. On the other hand the soul is anchored to the material: 'ioyned to þe body in twey maners' which defines the soul as mover to the moved, controlling the body

<sup>150</sup> See *Parts* 656 a, 15 - 20.

<sup>151</sup> This is precisely why the philosopher Porphyry defends the 'categorical doctrine expounded by Aristotle by rejecting any claim identifying *Categories* with "genera of Being" Porphyry sees his master Plotinus' approach to be mistaken in applying Aristotle's categories (in Porphyry's view intended to account for the *natural* world) to the intelligible and supernatural realm, and then criticising them as inapplicable - exactly what Bartholomaeus does here. See Evangeliou *op cit.*, pp. 5 - 6.

by reason ‘as a shipman is i-oned to þe ship’ (*DPR* 3. 1). Since man as a unitary whole, though-blended of the corporeal and the spiritual, is one substance, body and soul cannot be thought of as two complete entities. The soul, rather, informs matter and is the principle of bodily structure, sensation and thought being the form of the body (*anima est forma corporis*). This is the same for both man and animal, the difference only that man’s soul is reasonable. The stress of the Aristotelian analogue is man’s special duality in his shared species as an animal, and the potential problems encountered at the literal level of interpretation, where he is categorised as both man and animal.

The reason for inverting the priority of the universals by Aquinas is to privilege man above animal, and particular over universal. He makes the important distinction that universals are not ‘primary’ but come as the result of thought, abstracts based on examples of what unquestionably exists. For Aquinas thinking penetrates through the particular to the universal. He sees Aristotle’s particulars as instances of universals which are themselves abstracts. For Aquinas it is not until thinking is completed that universals as such are evident to the mind.

Aristotle distinguished two meanings of the *substance*. Firstly, the what a thing is, as given by its definition [and contrasted as a category of being with the where it is, how it is, how much it is, etc] ... secondly, *substance* means an individual subject subsisting in this category of substance, [the thing whose *what* we are giving]. *Subject* is the general name for anything that can be described in this way; but as existing independently and not within something else it is said to be subsistent, as instantiating a nature it is called *natural thing*, and as subject to properties a *substance*.<sup>152</sup>

This reads like an explanation of the principle of the *DPR*, though Aquinas moves toward a theological understanding where things are defined not merely biologically, but within a hierarchy with God at the top. While Aquinas’ exposition on substance

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<sup>152</sup> *ST* 1999., Q 29 art. 2., pp. 68 - 69.

sounds very much like Aristotle, he disagrees that man does not exist as a particular and can only exist in the categorisable sense, as a secondary substance or universal. That man exists regardless of scientific definition is of primary importance for Aquinas, who sees substance itself as logically prior to the actual positions in space and time, as required by Aristotle's universals. Under these terms a spiritual being which occupied space could be said to be at once individual and species because it exists, regardless of denominators. Again, Aristotle's material empiricism is extended into the realm of insensibles for the sake of inherently Christian thought, where knowledge and being are correlative: if a thing is, it is knowable and in it resides its ontological truth. But we can never really know it in *itself*. Rather, it can only be known by us, from our own *limited perspective*. The more perfect its being, the more difficult it is for us to know it. This shifts the emphasis of species and genera to a genera of being. Our ability to conceive of hybrid animals, albeit that we cannot perceive their complete meaning, is physical proof enough that they exist and have a meaning. Such empiricism is a secondary aid to understanding, supporting faith as being of primary importance. As Gilson specifies, empiricism does not singularly allow belief, but belief facilitates understanding: *credo ut intelligam*. Existence, prior to empirical or scientific definition, provided Aquinas with another understanding of the universals.

Such a reversal of the primacy of second substances such as species and genera over the concrete individual, prioritises individuals or particulars. Following Etienne Gilson's outlining of the privileging of the universal, where individual existents should not be neatly comprehended within universal categories, but give fuller respect to their particularities, Kevin McGinley observes that:

The generally-held principles that universals preceded particulars in the order of being (even if, from the Aristotelian perspective, the priority was reversed in the order of knowing), and that this order of being involved an ontological hierarchy rising from things through their universal forms to the divine Ideas in the mind of God, tend to reinforce the assumption that what is universal in



existence is also what is highest therein and thus most worthy of attention, being closest to God.<sup>153</sup>

The problem of positing this prioritisation of the two types of primary substance, man and beast, is that man as a first substance has an ontologically different status in Christian thought. How can the individual *not* exist when it is the individual which gives scientific definition in the first instance of creation, and who in the first instance is made in the image of God? It is typical of the Christian paradigm that it underlines the importance of an individuated ontology of man, who is made in God's image, as being of fundamental significance. In Thomastic thought a species is something intermediate between external object and mind. The motivation for this is twofold: i. the external object is material, but the grasp of the mind is not: ii. objects are particular, whilst the mind contemplates universals. Active reason abstracts the form of species from the *Phantasmata* so that it issues in the passive reason as *species expressa*. It is expressed, rather than impressed or imposed [*impressa*]. Aquinas calls this the *conversio ad phantasmata*; using an analogy which he takes from Aristotle, he refers to the illumination of the species. By defining the species, the *act* of cognition and the *object* of cognition can come together. Aristotle's statements, however, still dominate the understanding of the animal in the *DPR* as the statement that 'þe propirtees of þinges folewyth þe substaunce' illustrates. Clearly man and animal do exist as particulars. However Aristotle and Bartholomaeus obviously understand that in order to make general statements about a species or genus, individuals must be compared to find common denominators. 'If the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for other things to exist' says Aristotle, 'animal is predicated of man and therefore also of the individual man; for were it predicated of none of the individual men it would not be predicated of man at all.'<sup>154</sup> Porphyry's exposition on the subject provides a useful recapitulation of Aristotle's thought:

<sup>153</sup> Kevin McGinley, 'The (r)uses of poetry: a study of the work of Robert Henryson in the context of scholastic literary theory', unpublished 1996 Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1997) p. 87.

<sup>154</sup> *Cat.* 2a, 362 b. 6.

It is reasonable that, after the primary substances, their species and genera should be the only other things called [secondary] substances. For only they, of things predicated, reveal the primary substance. For if one is to say of the individual man what he is, it will be in place to give the species or the genus (though more informative to give man than animal); ... Further, it is because the primary substances are subjects for everything else that they are called substances most strictly. But as the primary substances stand to everything else, so the species and genera of the primary substances stand to all the rest: all the rest are predicated of these.<sup>155</sup>

Porphyry highlights that a difference between Aristotle and his scholastic commentators is one of priority. Though not scientifically knowable, Particulars are obviously important to Aristotle because they are the basis for knowledge about types of thing. As observed above, where Aristotle bestows priority on the science and methods of categorisation based upon the universal, Aquinas' Christian thought emphasises the primacy of the particular. This means that individual animals take precedence in Thomastic thought, and individual men, made in the image of their God, and with the *logos* which encapsulates the rationale of their Creator, take precedence over all other things. The scholastic tendency to displace the Aristotelian perspective which sees man as primarily an animal, and secondarily a rational animal is a clear illustration of the way that the animal is displaced and distanced from man by the Christian paradigm. The *DPR*, being earlier than such definitions as Aquinas propounds, however, still employs Aristotle's conception that understanding form and substance allows orderly definition by species and genera. While Bartholomaeus categorises all animals in one book, man is not included in the bestiary. He is, though, defined first and foremost in the corporeal context as an animal, as a beast who is like God (*DPR* 3. 1).

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<sup>155</sup> Evangeliou *op cit.*, pp. 61 - 62.

While the text clearly takes Aristotelian structures and principles, by the terms of definition which it propounds man should be included in the bestiary. Instead mankind is treated separately, and placed in the third book. This subverts the Aristotelian structure, which would highlight man's corporeal similarity, kinship, and definition as an animal. This is important if we are to understand the placement of the animal. Though prior to the unequivocal Thomistic statements which re-categorise man as a primarily spiritual being, mankind is already separated from the animal in the *DPR*, and placed higher than the animal, when according to the adopted Aristotelian structure he should primarily be seen as the same. Equally, if the universals of genera and species are to be followed truly, the text must be seen as one which deconstructs and tests such methods of categorisation by including particular examples of fabulous beasts, which cannot be, in Aristotle's terms, scientifically known. The very medieval collection of fabulous and hybrid beasts speak rather of a desire to test, extend and explore boundaries of thought and category, in such a way as to suggest that they do not really exist. In doing so, the boundary between man and animal is categorically widened, and so thoroughly explored, that mankind's preoccupation with distancing itself from, and Othering, the animal, is revealed.

## **2. 3 The problem of universals**

The universals debate is important to the study of the way the animal is perceived in this period. It asked whether the terms 'universal', 'species', 'genera', had any relation to reality, or had grammatical significance, where signs exist as meaningful acts, and where metaphorising the status of a thing contrasts with a specific temporal object. This second sense must not be confused with the notion that words have merely 'grammatical' significance, but they have crucial metaphysical significance, as mental acts. The debate provides a critical position by which we may begin to understand the literary representation of 'real' animals. It also allows us to understand how medieval notions of truth may be embodied in abstract or fictive images and

depictions of the animal. In addition the very existence of such thought illustrates the centrality of Porphyry's thought and influence on medieval philosophy and literature, while his position on animals remains unacknowledged. Aristotle's terms and propositions are clarified and formulated into the medieval problem of universals by the set of questions raised by Porphyry in his *Eisagōgē* or introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*:

I shall beg off saying anything about (a) whether genera and species are real or are situated in bare thought alone, (b) whether as real they are bodies or incorporeals, and (c) whether they are separated or in sensibles and have their reality in connection with them. Such business is profound, and requires another, greater investigation.<sup>156</sup>

Porphyry does not undertake the investigation, leaving irresistible questions for medieval thinkers and Latin commentators, beginning with Boethius. The result is that universals as a mode of classification became a paradigm of cognition pre-occupying medieval thought. Knowledge, sited in the individual parts of things, was equated with a complete and total knowledge of the whole. As already observed, discussion was of the two sorts of class names, species and genera. Porphyry asks not if things exist in 'merely words' [*verbum tantum*] but 'in bare thought alone'. The distinction that he makes here is not that words are signs which *express* ideas or concepts, but that words such as 'genera' and 'species' *are* ideas and concepts.

Though it is not the *modus* of the *compiler* to interpret or comment but to report things as they are understood by his chosen authorities (*auctoritates*) there is a sense in which Bartholomaeus acknowledges the problem in chapters six to fifteen of book one of the *DPR* which follows the 'nouns *abstractum* op̄ *concretum*' (*DPR* I. 7) or conceptual grammar of Abelard which 'Gilbert de la Porée applied to theology as a grammatical description, then being modified by speculative grammar which reflects

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<sup>156</sup> Though cited above, Porphyry's comment is important, and for the sake of the flow of argument, I refer to it here for a second time. Spade *op cit.*, p. 2.

like a *speculum* the reality underlying the phenomena of the visible world.’<sup>157</sup> But Bartholomaeus also demonstrates an understanding akin to Aquinas’ version of the universal where both material empiricism and divine Truths are synthesised.

The specific representation of animals, be they known and ‘real’ or fantastical and reported, are represented by distinctive features which are subordinated to the prior universal values which must be available if the animal is to be knowable in general, encyclopaedic terms, and which in turn define their significance and function as aspects of creation. This viewpoint is fundamentally ‘realist’ in privileging the universal, because it embodies a faith in the possibility of ratiocinating or aligning particular elements within the bounds of universal norms. This is not seen as neglecting the importance of the corporeal or worldly reality, but rather to represent that which is most real within it.<sup>158</sup> Thus, understanding elements such as the fantastical animals as both ‘real’ literal sense examples, but also as symbolic epistemes embodying a meaning abstracted from their literal sense reality, is an attempt to bring a blurred ontological reality into focus by highlighting some universal or ontological truths for which they stand.<sup>159</sup> A creation already abstracted in a book mapping God’s creation must inevitably involve textual animals as statements of Christian belief and faith, revealing to the exegete Christian truth, which may not alone be signified by a ‘real’ or any literal - sense understanding.<sup>160</sup> The universals debate had come to a head in a conflict between William of Champeaux (d.1120) and Abelard who won his case that universality is predicable of words alone. Abelard makes it clear that he is not speaking of the word as a literal sense physical entity (*flatus vocis*) but of the word or name expressive of a logical content<sup>161</sup> which the word signifies. This logical content is the universal concept formed by and in abstraction. If, for instance, man is considered a member of the class of substances, we predicate of him the content of a universal concept which is formed by abstract

<sup>157</sup> Seymour *op cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>158</sup> See Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949) p. 59.

<sup>159</sup> For a detailed account of the understand of real and ideal see my discussion below p. 22 (3. 4).

<sup>160</sup> Jerome, after all, had declared that classical fables could be employed only if they were not ‘contrary to sothness that is known.’ For a further discussion see Greetham *op cit.*, pp. 674 - 675.

<sup>161</sup> See F. C. Coplestone, *Medieval Philosophy*, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1952) p. 38 ff.

action from actual or primary substances. So, to thinkers like Abelard, however real or unreal a thing seems to be is irrelevant in comparison with the grammatical qualities of an abstract thing and the idea or truth for which such grammar is a vehicle.

## 2. 4 Species (n)or genus

Bartholomaeus' adherence to aspects of Aristotle's categorical system highlights incongruities in the bestiary of *De proprietatibus rerum*. Concerns and discomfort surrounding the animal, as well as elements which seem scientifically specious or anomalous, can prove incongruous when *whatness* or belonging defies categorisation by species and genus. This is characterised at the literal level by the extreme categorical and ontological indistinctness of particular animals.<sup>162</sup> My focus upon the fantastical and hybrid animals illustrates the way that they constitute the most convenient animal sign. They combine man and beast as a single animal to provide the strangest - though clearest - sign of the way man is inseparably involved with his animal nature. Hybrids, in terms of species and genus, are also inherently problematic because they are indistinct, and neither one species or another. While my focus here includes all animals, man and beast alike, my particular attention to the abnormal group, is to reveal the way that such monstrosity and hybridity constitutes the symbolic amplification of man's distancing from himself and exclusion of animality. Animals of the imagination, such as fable animals and hybrid animals became essential metaphors, which acted as exemplars and guide the reader to metaphysical

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<sup>162</sup> One way to see this is in terms of Aristotelian semiotics which would focus on signs secondary: the inscribed word, uttered word, and corresponding thought to cause an affectation of the soul which would signify the sign primary, or in fact the thing itself. 'Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which they directly symbolise, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images ... As there are in the mind thoughts which do not involve truth or falsity, and also those which must be either true or false, so it is in speech. For truth and falsity imply combination and separation. Nouns and verbs, provided nothing is added, are like thoughts without combination or separation; 'man' and 'white', as isolated terms, are not yet either true or false. In proof of this, consider the word 'goat-stag'. It has significance, but there is no truth or falsity about it ...' *De Interpretatione* 1. 16 a, 4 - 18. Grammatical truth, in other words is contingent, merely instigating the thought for which words are signifiers, to perceive the truth of the thing.

truths. They also test philosophical boundaries and definitions in such a way as to suggest that the animal is impossible to place in any simplistic or categorical sense. The animal, in these terms, escapes from the confines of the bestiary to take on inherently Christian roles and functions. Their metaphysical duality makes them alien, but at the same time draws attention to man's own potential, monstrous duality. If 'animal' is a genus and man or dog is a 'species', then the fantastical hybrids, for example, are ambiguous because while they are definitely 'animal' their type is so hybrid that it challenges generic categorisation. The *cameleopardo* of chapter twenty presents a conglomeration of binary opposites. A 'beste of Ethiopia' it is described as sheep - like in its nature, though it looks fierce. It is both carnivore and herbivore with 'þe heed of a camele, þe nekke of an hors, and legges and feet of a bugle, and spekkes of þe parde'. A parde is a small wild cat, which explains the second part of the noun, the name being descriptive of other types of animal altogether. Bartholomaeus continues 'þe beste was clene to mete by Moyses lawe but nought to sacrifice ... as it is ywrtie *Deuteronomii xiiii.*' (DPR 18. 20). However, this is a spurious citation of the Deuteronomy list of clean and unclean animals: as the *cameleopardo* chews cud and is cloven footed it may, apparently, be consumed (Deut. 14. 7), though of course in terms of the practical context of the discussion the animal does not exist. While giving scriptural credence to the animal's existence the *cameleopardo* is not one of the animals mentioned in Deuteronomy. And where the camel is a cud-chewing animal in Deuteronomy, it is hoofed and cannot be eaten, while Bartholomaeus' *cameleopardo* is cloven footed so, by the Deuteronomy criterion, can.

A *cameleopardo* is certainly of the genus animal. But attempting to categorise it as a species, such as camel or leopard, is impossible because of its hybridity. What may have symbolic value for a Christian reading would have no value at all for Aristotle, because it resists definition. This inability to know such hybrid animals 'scientifically' as a second substance or as anything other than a singular example leads to an inconclusive categorisation, unless there is a category which may accommodate such patent plurality, isolation, and the symbolic existence of each individual animal. Where and what, then, is their place in the text? If Bartholomaeus is concerned less

with the thing than with defining its properties as a type we would expect to find the significant universals that they signify, and share in common with other animals of their species. This being inconclusive at the literal level, we can approach them in a number of ways. The first approach would be to say simply that as they are reported from the writings of other authorities within the *compilatio*. In this sense a distinction cannot be made empirically between *real* or *ideal*. Bartholomaeus has to trust reports and commentaries and so cannot conclude whether these animals are ‘real’ in the material sense, or not.

There is also a sense in which an animal such as the *cameleopardo* tests a number of boundaries as well as testing the philosophical text itself. The frequent use of hybrids can be seen as evidence of this, though categorisation is a problem of the animal in general and especially so of man, whose hybridity consists in him being both animal and spiritual entity. Such hybridity is dealt with in textual abstraction in order to draw attention to the inadequacy of categorical orderliness. At the literal level of Aristotle’s universals which distinguish, discriminate and separate, the *cameleopardo* precisely tests categorisation by not conforming to the biological or categorical organisation of genera and species. On another level, and despite the literal sense status of the text, there is a moral need to prove man’s humanness by illustrating what he is not, and by showing what he wishes to distance himself from. This constitutes what we might see as the indistinct boundary of the human where human fears of underlying similarity prompt the dissolution of the Aristotelian boundaries of the animal, in favour of illustrative metaphors which exaggerate man’s duality as an animal, precisely in order to warn him what he could potentially become. The patently figurative domain of the hybrid, on these terms, is highlighted by the fact that only human beings would discriminate by producing logical and categorical boundaries, writing a philosophical text, and distancing themselves from other animals. Hybrids in this sense are a distancing device which demonises the beast as well as the animal in man. They defy any biological and categorical order, and infringe the boundaries of the human. While they may look like man they are monstrous precisely because they are so close to man’s own image. Monsters and hybrids, in this way may be seen as an attempt to



articulate the Hellenic base to Christian thought, by testing the philosophical categories and principles which sustain the order of which it is a part, or discrediting such categorisation in favour of Christian *author-isation* and symbolism.

Bartholomaeus notes that St Anthony is reported to have seen a fauns, giving the beast's existence the best authoritative credence. But the example of the faun raises other questions about the categorisation of the animal. We are told that 'Certeyn bestes beþ ycleped *fauni* and *satiri* also and beþ bestes wonderliche yschape wip likenesse and schappe of men but þay beþ nought ful partyn[er]s of resoun of mankynde.' (DPR 18. 48) Fauns have bestial wit alone, and an appetite for lechery, killing women by the very act of rape: 'suche bestes beþ ful lecherous, in so moche þat þey sleep wommen in þe dede of leccery if þey takeþ hem walkynge in woodes.' (DPR 18. 48) The account reads like a morality lesson about pastoral excursions, in which a courtly separation is the prescribed antidote to a natural world which threatens to infringe its boundaries and impinge upon the human with that which is already distinctly, in fact, human. James Knowles places this impingement in interestingly psychological terms: 'boundaries of the human and the animal are highly contested limen' [*sic: liminis*, (pl.) 'limina']<sup>163</sup> suggesting a subconscious desire to separate the idea of a rational human self from its own animality. As such, the boundaries typified by the faun are both transparently moral, human, and dangerously permeable, yet also a metaphor for man's own state in relation to the universals which highlight his corporeal kinship with, and inseparability from the beast.

At another level the faun is a classic example of the medieval paradigm's 'othering'. Like an animal from the waist down and human from the waist up, the hybrids often have a man's head, leading to man's identification with *rationale* as the defining characteristic of his species.<sup>164</sup> Bartholomaeus tells us that fauns do not speak, are 'nought ytaught to speke by crafte nouþer by kynde'. Yet in the same few lines he

<sup>163</sup> Knowles, James, 'Can ye not tell a man from a marmoset?: Apes and Others on the Early Modern Stage', In Erica Fudge, ed., *Renaissance Beasts*, (Illinois, forthcoming 2003), p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> I am aware that this argument is akin to post-structuralist assertions that reason has often been used to exclude, denigrate or silence opinions that differ from the dominant view: the 'Other' side is always irrational.

says they *do* speak, though only to mimic man: 'þough suche bestes vsen nou3t resoun of mankynde, 3it þey beþ like to mankynde in voice.' (DPR 18. 48). Like the figure of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, fauns speak an alien language which they gibber, though do not understand. Like Caliban too, it is uncertain whether they can make a man. They have an uncertain ontology where it is unclear whether a hybrid is a man in the making or unmaking, revealing and exploring the dangerous animality of humanity in relation to what are readily transcendable categories.<sup>165</sup> While analogous to man, their lustful behaviour signifies the misplaced value of the worldly object over the spiritual. Though they have 'human heads and therefore presumably have the capacity for advanced reasoning, their half-animal natures suggest that their behaviour is governed by their baser physical instinct.'<sup>166</sup>

This close identification with, yet alienation from reason, can be seen in Bartholomaeus' inclusion of *cenocephali*, *ciclopes*, *panchios* and men with no head or neck but with recognisable human faces: 'þese wonderful bestes ... beþ al hedles and nekeles and he[re] yhen beþ in þe schuldres' (DPR 18. 48) As already noted, according to Aristotle mankind is supposed to look upwards to God, his upright posture the sign, symbol, and physiological manifestation of his reason; Bartholomaeus stresses that though he is of 'þe erþe' man is also '*Antropos*' or 'arered vp' to face his god.<sup>167</sup> But men with no neck or heads would not fall into the categorical species of man, thus changing and at the same time fixing the shape of the reasonable man: 'Some beþ in Ethiopia þat goþ stouping, lokinge to þe groundeward as bestes and mowe nought rere hem self vpright.' (DPR 18. 48). While beasts are different from man by their appearance, the hybrids complicate such a distinction by virtue of their similarity to man. Can the hybrid have a prototype? If man bears corporeal similarity to God, where does this situate the hybrids, who are in some part similar to God's image, if inconclusively so? In part the answer is rhetorical: to know man you must first understand his corporeality; 'for þe properties of man schulde be

<sup>165</sup> For a discussion see Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beast in Early Modern English Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002) p. 89.

<sup>166</sup> Carmen Brown, 'Animals as Human Exemplars' in Debra Hassig, ed., *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Life Art and Literature* (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999) p. 57.

<sup>167</sup> DPR 3. 1., citing *Parts* 656 a., 10 - 15.

þe more opunliche iknowe to bestis-sche men ... of þe which he is imaade and componed ...' (*DPR* 3. 1). In what may be seen as animal Orientalism, the textual representation of hybrids is clearly an analogous attempt to define the human by denying the animal. Being like - though not actually - man, the physical dichotomy of animal and man highlights man's nature and genus as an animal.<sup>168</sup>

In these terms, the fantastical appearance of the half-man always retains an overt suggestion of metaphoricity, often underpinned by the generic geographical 'othering' of the East. Fauns are very definitely from Scythia: 'also in sicia beþ bestes wip schappe of men and feet of hors.' (*DPR* 18. 48). When the locus of the fantastic beasts was not specified as India, Ethiopia was often, in medieval literature, said to be their place of origin. David Williams observes that what he terms the India-Ethiopia complex 'is an example of medieval sign making at work in the field of teratological geography, where spatial semiotics oppresses the idea of the monster as simultaneously participating in the material and spiritual worlds and thus forming a bridge between the two.'<sup>169</sup> In the sense of geographical distancing, and by racial difference and definition, the hybrid animals are understood to really exist but *far away, not here*, while concurrently guaranteeing that they cannot be empirically authenticated, nor in fact pose any real threat. This understanding of hybridity both figurative and geographical, is accentuated by the awareness of the corporeal hybridity of mankind. That Pygmies are included in the bestiary poses the question of whether they are animal or human. This is clearly answered by the statement that though they are perfectly made if small, they inhabit mountains in, and are from, India: they are bestial at best, and confined to the bestiary.<sup>170</sup>

In the case of an animal such as the *onocentauro*, categorical and ontological ambiguity, a bestial lack of reason, and geographical othering, are most polarised. Half man, and ass from the navel down, the *onocentauro* is a centaur from India

<sup>168</sup> See Donna Haraway's discussion of what she terms 'simian orientalism', in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Verso, 1992) p. 10.

<sup>169</sup> David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (London: University of Exeter Press, 1996) p. 14.

<sup>170</sup> See 'pigmeis', *DPR*, 18. 86.

which ‘feyneþ somdele þe schapp of mannes kynde.’ (DPR 18. 79). His licentious lechery and the suggestion that he forces himself upon human women in order to copulate and breed, signifies a profound anxiety about the re-generation of bestial aspects of man. While he already has the categorical status of the animal, mankind may easily embody the form of his bestial nature should he forget his God and his reason and live by the habitual satisfactions of the flesh which came with the fall. Allowing such characteristically worldly ‘animal’ passions to invade the Christian self, would merely assist the continuance of the post-lapsarian metamorphosis toward the bestial and the beast. In his description of the *pilosis* Bartholomaeus describes a wild man who forces human women to have sex, explaining the noun incubus to be ‘doynge þe dede of generacioun.’ (DPR 18. 84). *Piloses* exist for the purpose of copulation alone. Tellingly, beneath their questionable appearance they are like men, merely taking the shape of a beast. What seems clear is that there is a blurring of categories which reveals the animal within each human. That the primary characteristic of the *Pilosis* is lust, again suggests a prescriptive warning that by immoral acts human people can descend to the level of the beast, allowing the beast that is always contained within mankind to emerge as the other of itself. An expression of mankind’s animal nature, such a figure stands as a warning to avoid digression to animal acts and habits. As might be expected from the non-conformity of a textual world of hybrids, this emergence of the animal is also a characteristic of the text. While the animal is contained at the literal sense its symbolic meaning cannot be suppressed beneath the text’s literal surface, emerging as a distinct subtext whose origin lies in reality, or in Aristotle’s terms, in the concrete existence of individuals who are the basis of an embodiment of some truth, however abstract and hybridised such an expression seems to be. In Avicenna’s terms it is

impossible for the universal animal to be a particular real animal, for it would then have to be both walker and flyer, as well as not walker or flyer, and be both biped and quadruped ... a universal is not an actual existence

except in thought. Its reality, however, both exists in thought and is external to thought.<sup>171</sup>

Avicenna's statement allows us properly to understand that what is improbable in reality, is possible ontologically, and may be believed, in a significantly illustrative way. But this also allows a view of the *DPR* as a text which is far from merely literal in its literary sense, and that inbuilt, there are two realms to account for if interpretation of hybrid animals is to bear fruit: that of the potential and that of the actual. Reading the text as a scholastic *summa* from a modern point of view involves subjecting its statements, and the textual representations of animals, to the inquiry of a close textual pathology, rather than questioning the literal believability of the information presented, about the animals of the text.

## 2. 5 *Habeas corpus*: did imaginary animals exist?

Carmen Brown makes an important observation about the way in which the twelfth - century saw different types of animal appearing in literary texts:

These were animals of the imagination, fable animals, fantastical animals. ... Animals become important as metaphors, as guides to metaphysical truths, as human exemplars. These imaginary animals exerted an even more important influence over the relationship between humans and animals than did the ox ...<sup>172</sup>

Brown draws attention to the notion that 'imaginary' animals illustrate metaphysical truth by means of metaphors. D. C. Greetham suggests that the phenomenon presents a difficulty which is inherited with classical fable material and analogues, prompting

<sup>171</sup> Morewedge, Parviz, *The Metaphysics of Avicenna* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973) p. 33.

<sup>172</sup> Brown *op cit.*, p. 103 - 104.

the ‘inevitable doctrinal problem of how to deal with such pagan authority.’<sup>173</sup> That these animals are included in the ‘scientific’ literal sense text of the *DPR* is problematic in that the meaning they had to their first audience is lost to a medieval audience. In the *DPR* such animals can be seen instantly to infringe categories because they overlap cognitive paradigms. Meaning has to be ascribed to them in their new context. Each animal, in these terms, represents a point of departure signifying the negation of the animal element in man. But each departure is a linguistic one where textual nomenclature serve as labels for the conceptual, providing a series of symbolic, hybridised polarities which define what *is*. In this way the ‘objective’ literal sense definitions have a value which does not directly correspond to a material reality.

Bartholomaeus’ bestiary does not alone provide a self explanatory hermeneutic of how its animals should be understood. Bartholomaeus’ initial statement that the Aristotelian principle of knowing the properties of things by their substance is important. However, it is also true to say that the animals of chapter eighteen are a very medieval collection of beasts, and would be interpreted by a specifically exegetical approach. Gilson states that:

... it would be of little use to consult the mystics; they are not interested in what nature *is*, but rather in what it *signifies*. To go to the Lapidaries and Bestiaries, as some well-known philologists have done, would be like going to an almanack-maker for the contemporary scientific astronomy. The only possible witnesses to medieval philosophy are ... the philosophers themselves.<sup>174</sup>

Though the two are obviously interdependent, I am concerned here with how hybrids and fabulous beasts are semiotically understood and not with *what* they sign. As Gilson suggests, a *compiler* like Bartholomaeus is not the best authoritative hermeneut to explain how his bestiary should be understood, while theologians such

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<sup>173</sup> Greetham *op cit.*, p. 665.

<sup>174</sup> Gilson 1936 *op cit.*, p. 358.

as Augustine and Aquinas provide a way to understand *the way* in which these animals signify.

In what way do the hybrid animals of the *DPR* relate or conform to distinctions of ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’? As an approach to reading mythical beasts, understanding that universal characteristics are more significant than unique examples because numerous signs prove a coherently readable intention, allows the idea of a thing to be placed above the thing itself. As abstractions which inhabit the borders of the imagination, any particular animal is almost irrelevant compared to its universal or symbolic meaning. At the literal level the objective description of an animal, however ‘scientific’ it claims to be, can never represent the sum total of all that animal’s potential symbolic meanings, which if not about a real known existence may speak of a possible existence. In this way an animal such as Bartholomaeus’ griffin can be seen to embody values which, in the absence of a physical body, maintain its anagogic truth. It is like a ‘leoun in alle þe partyes of þe body and to þe eagle oonliche in hede and wynges.’ It is a ‘strong enemy to hors, as Hugucioun seiþ, þat he takeþ vp hors and þe man y-armed.’ (*DPR* 18. 56).<sup>175</sup> The griffin exists solely to guard jewels and riches. Bartolomaeus goes on to describe how its defence of material wealth is characterised by its aggression to the armed man, and so effective is its guardianship that its form is copied as a deterrent and set at the borders of kingdoms. In this mould, the griffin is disseminated into poetic fictions such as Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, a tale about the divine order of the universe in which the griffin is a microcosm: a simile, symbol, and synecdoche for the majesty and Kingship of ‘Lygurge hymself’.

And like a grifphon looked he about,  
 With kempe heeris on his browes stoute;  
 His lymes grete, his brawnes harde and stronge,  
 His shuldres brode, his armes rounde and longe

(*KnT* 2133 - 36)

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<sup>175</sup> ‘Hugucioun’ or Huguicio Pisanus (d. 1210) was a lawyer and grammarian and is cited in books 13, 17, 18, 19 of the *DPR*.

Grounded in the sort of observational statements of the *DPR* which describe the physical world, the science of the literal sense is a negated discourse when its limitations are transcended by raising the signifying power of the hybrid to an anagogical level in the poetic text.<sup>176</sup> While Bartholomaeus' assertions about these literal existences sustain other levels of truth, such as symbolism in the poetic text, reality is one corresponding to nothing that actually *is* in the material sense. Symbolic value is clearly inherited and built into the literal level representation, through the use of Isidore and Huguicio Pisanus. The symbolic meaning of the Griffin (Lev. 11. 13; Deut. 14. 12) is transmitted through Isidore's emphasis on its hostility and aggression,<sup>177</sup> and its status as an evil principle because it attains victory over men whom it tears to pieces, remains intact in the *DPR* and in 'The Knight's Tale'. Indeed, it would not be justifiable to impose confines upon the divine by questioning the existence of such a beast.

As an imagistically rooted group hybrids exist, on one level at least, to stimulate the intellect and its apprehension, as seen in the Platonic context where the contemplation of the corporeal may draw us to the contemplation of the beauty of the soul. The intention of distinguishing by *sciencia* or a knowledge through the senses is the first step to *sapiential* wisdom gained by the contemplation of the reality of eternal truths. These ideal forms are both informatively and persuasively useful where the idea is placed higher than the thing itself.

The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of a thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse ... it consist really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas

<sup>176</sup> In the text notes of *The Riverside Chaucer* Vincent J. DiMarco draws attention to Bartholomaeus Anglicus as source material, p. 837.

<sup>177</sup> Isidore's *On Animals* XII, 2. 17, excerpted in Grant 1999 *op cit.*, p. 132.



those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do - which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters.<sup>178</sup>

From this we may read the hybrids in a specifically poetic sense as the embodiment of vice, virtue or as the mobilisation of a set of rhetorical devices the persuasive outcome of which is moral betterment: 'The use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions. When we know a thing, and have decided about it, there is no further use in speaking about it. ... All orators are bound to use the topic of the possible and impossible: and to try to show that a thing has happened, or will happen in the future.'<sup>179</sup> In rhetorical terms the realm of the potential, where all things are designed for knowledge in relation to the Necessary Being, is placed higher than the realm of the actual.

Avicenna, commenting on Aristotle, explains that 'knowledge of things comes not from second hand information, from intermediaries, but from itself, for all things and the causes of all things are due to it ... it is our creator who has given genesis to all things and has set for them the proper path.'<sup>180</sup>

Bestiary animals can represent abstract ideas or in Plato's terms, are signifiers of a universe of pure forms. As Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, things may exist because they are perceived. In these terms alone the fantastical animals *do* actually exist - albeit in the mind.<sup>181</sup> Umberto Eco observes that 'Griffins were just as real as lions because,

<sup>178</sup> Aristotle *poetics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathon Barnes, Bollingen Series LXXI Vol. 2 (London: Princeton University Press, 1985) I. 9, 1451 b1.

<sup>179</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathon Barnes, Bollingen Series LXXI Vol. 2 (London: Princeton University Press, 1985) II. 18, 1391 b1.

<sup>180</sup> Avicenna, cited by Morewedge *op cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>181</sup> As much is meant by Ruskin when he says 'a fine grotesque is the expression in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any other way.' Ruskin, John, 'Of the True Ideal' in *Modern Painters* (1856), abridged edition in 3 vols., ed. by David Barne (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987), Vol. 3., iv, pp. 331 - 2. Coleridge says that 'there is a philosophic (and inasmuch as it is actualised by an effort of freedom, an artificial) consciousness, which lies beneath or (as it were) behind the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflective beings.' Coleridge says that man has an intuitive knowledge to be able to interpret and understand the symbolism of a mythical animal: 'Potential works *in* them, even as the *actual* works on them! In short, all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it.' The consciousness itself, for Coleridge, furnishes 'proofs by its own direction.' S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by Nigel Leask (London: J. M. Dent, 1997) pp. 144 - 146.

like them, they were signs of a higher truth',<sup>182</sup> and Rudolph Wittkower cites scripture when he states that 'the fabulous races were the products of God's will who 'is righteous in all his ways and holy in his works.'<sup>183</sup> Eco goes on to explain that:

The pelican, which was believed to nourish its young with its own flesh, became a symbol of Christ who had given His blood for humanity and His flesh in the Eucharist. The unicorn could be captured by a virgin if it rested its head in her lap, so it was doubly a symbol of Christ – as the Son only – begotten of God, and begotten again in the womb of Mary. Once the symbolism had been accepted, the unicorn became even more 'real' than the ostrich or the pelican.<sup>184</sup>

The metaphysical issues which Eco addresses directly here, are those of how ontological truth is signified. The typology of the pelican's messianic self - sacrifice has metaphorical truth with a potential meaning which the actual may never contain. Augustine suggested that it was not important whether certain animals existed or not: what was important was their meaning. In *Contra mendacium* he defends Aesop's fables against the charge that they were lies, stating '*quod utique totum fingitur, ut ad rem quae intenditur, ficta quidem narratione, non mendaci tamen, sed veraci significatione veniatur.*'<sup>185</sup> Augustine explains that through a fictitious narrative a true signification may be referred to the matter at hand. While what exists in a fallen and delusory world may not be trusted the mind can see for itself what may be true. However, Augustine is also careful to avoid unqualified belief in the existence of hybrids: 'accounts of some of these races may be completely worthless' he admits.<sup>186</sup> Examining the problem of the fantastical from a literal perspective Augustine also meets the problem of ontological origins head-on, with the suggestion that human elements of hybrid beasts would necessitate their descent from Adam:

<sup>182</sup> Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. by High Bredin (1959: London: Yale University Press, 1986) p. 53.

<sup>183</sup> Rudolph Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) p. 53 ff, citing Psalm 145. 17.

<sup>184</sup> Eco *op cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>185</sup> Augustine, *Contra Mendacium*, PL, col. 538.

<sup>186</sup> DCD XVI, 10.

What am I to say of the *Cynocephali*, whose dog's head and actual barking prove them to be animals rather than men? Now we are not bound to believe in the existence of all the types of men which are described. But no faithful Christian should doubt that anyone who is born anywhere as a man - that is, a rational and mortal being - derives from that one first-created human being.<sup>187</sup>

At the literal level, Augustine highlights a metaphorical anomaly; the hybrids are metaphorical figures illustrating the dual nature of man's existence as a spiritual being made in his creator's image, while being an animal in the world of creation.

Metaphorically too, Augustine draws attention to the fundamental belief that God is the creator of all, who has the wisdom to weave the beauty of the whole design out of its constituent parts. However the observer who cannot view the whole is offended by what appears 'a deformity of the part, since he does not know how it fits in, or how it is related to the rest.'<sup>188</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto picks up on this paradox, where analogy and metaphoricity become confused, suggesting that:

what is true of deformed human births is equally true of the "monstrous races" – any of their members may be human, no matter how "extraordinary such a creature may appear to our senses in bodily shape, in colour, or motion, or utterance, or in any natural endowment, or part, or quality". God, in his capacious providence, knows the true nature of each individual component of his creation. The problem is that humans lack God's sublimely analytic vision. How are they to decide whether a being – a wild man – is human or not?<sup>189</sup>

Augustine also argues for the importance of a literal – typological correspondence to explain the fantastical, arguing that no untruth can exist in the scripture and its commentary whose reliability in accounts of past events is attested by the fulfilment

<sup>187</sup> DCD XVI, 8.

<sup>188</sup> DCD XVI, 8.

<sup>189</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 154 - 5.

of its prophecies in the future. So in Christian discussions of the bestiary by commentators such as Albertus Magnus, potentiality takes precedence over actuality. Pamela Gravestock observes that 'Albert as a man of the church, had as his ultimate agenda the support of scriptures rather than strict empiricism.'<sup>190</sup> It is difficult to disagree with the word of God, so hybrids are accepted, assimilated, and explained. C. S. Lewis identifies the allegorical nature of interpreting creation by apparently specious beasts and the bestial when he states that '[a]llegory, in some senses, belongs not to medieval man but to man, or even of mind, in general. It is the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms.'<sup>191</sup> Representation of the 'immaterial fact' such as the passions of actual experience lead to the invention of *visibilia* which express them: Lewis explains this when he says:

As the god Amor and his figurative garden are to the actual passions of men, so perhaps we ourselves and our 'real' world are to something else. The attempts to read that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype of the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism.<sup>192</sup>

As Lewis understands it the 'real' exists in an elsewhere which, being no longer on earth after the fall, is all the more difficult to locate, finding its expression in imitations which embody some part or truth of that world. Sacramentally, being involved in the things of the world is also to participate in God's act of Creation, which should be revered, as God is, in a sense, in the finite things of the world. They are not him, though are a part of him. The medieval understanding of that which cannot be empirically proven is not that it should be in any way negated or dismissed. Hybrids are not, in fact, a contradiction of God's good nature, but rather a contradiction of unbending epistemological categories, which occurs in the testing of the philosophical text. Seeing hybrids in these terms deals Augustine's realism in 'deriving' them from the first rational man a death blow, by demonstrating the absurd

<sup>190</sup> Pamela Gravestock, 'Did Imaginary Animals Really Exist?' in Hassig *op cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>191</sup> Lewis, C. S., *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 44.

<sup>192</sup> Lewis 1958 *ibid.*, p. 45.

consequences which follow from confusing the logical and the ontological orders, with different logical types. Augustine understands the metaphorical status of the hybrid, and its potential significations. But he also feels he must justify such anomalies by explaining the placement of the hybrid in direct relation to the literal logic of scripture. Mystical meaning, in other words, should not be subjected too rigorously to rational scrutiny. David Williams states that:

The Christian middle ages frankly declared the ultimate unknowability of the Supreme Cause, who remained, and would remain forever, a mystery beyond human intellection. But medieval thinkers were vigorous in their pursuit of whatever could be known – of causes, beings, concepts – even if they could not know Being, Cause or *Nous*.<sup>193</sup>

Williams draws attention to the Neoplatonic - and subsequently Christian - awareness of the problems of over reliance on language and logic. Instead he suggests that symbolism and representation are at the very centre of scholastic thought because they are divine in origin, and only in a derivative sense constitute a human science. The Neoplatonic idea of the *Nous* or One which transcends all Being altogether cannot be conceptualised because of its infinite immensity, and by virtue of the fact that it is prior to thought and Language. Any attempt to think of the *Nous* results in the moment of fixity, *either conceptually or linguistically, which prohibits the perceiver from understanding the Nous*.<sup>194</sup> There is something of the *Nous*, however, within all created beings. In the corporeal setting the first level of reality derived from the One is the realm of mind, the realm of true Being - also called the *Nous* – of which each individual mind is a part. Though not identical with the Christian Triune Godhead, the idea of the Christian trinity takes as its theological and philosophical analogue this essentially Neoplatonic idea, in which each person is the entire divinity as well as individually himself.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Williams *op cit.*, pp. 25 - 26.

<sup>194</sup> *Enn.* VI. .4, 8.

<sup>195</sup> *Enn.* V. 8, 4.

Such an understanding presents another Neoplatonic elucidation of the question of whether anything at all can have a truly independent existence; while a chair or a Griffin may not actually speak for and of itself, its purpose and design speaks of its maker, and contains something of him. The significance of the meaning of such things - albeit that they are imagined things - must be understood in the realm of mind. Thus the realm of the potential and the realm of the actual in the Neoplatonism of Porphyry are notions which serve to stress the concept that truth exists in incorporeals:

Platonism has been much maligned because of the idea of an incorporeal, archetypal realm has been seen as merely the projection on our minds of sense-objects; and this less real than these objects. The materialist-positivist assumption that there are no such incorporeals and that the sense world is the summit of reality, however, has serious faults. The first is that mathematical consistency can be explained by the assumption that mental objects have an objective existence, while it cannot be demonstrated through purely formalist theories, as incompleteness theories have shown.<sup>196</sup>

Plato's theory of ideal forms would not place emphasis on such abstract forms as representations of knowledge and belief, but rather identify them as replicas of things in an ontological reality. In book five of the *Republic* Plato does *not* argue that knowledge requires forms as objects: rather knowledge is argued to be of 'what is' and forms brought in as examples of 'what is', demonstrating that such a form is, a universal distinct from particular things.<sup>197</sup> Arguing about whether forms are tangible may never, for Plato, negate their validity. For him mirrors are insentient and are not self-contained, but consciousness is always pure and self-contained; it does not require an external object to create an image. Ordinary mirrors are liable to be soiled by extraneous dirt whereas consciousness has nothing foreign to it, being always alone and undivided.<sup>198</sup> Objects, in this sense, are necessary for producing images in the mirror which is the world. They are not, however, necessary for consciousness

<sup>196</sup> Porphyry's *Launching Points to the Realm of Mind: An Introduction to the Neoplatonic Philosophy of Plotinus*, trans. by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1988) p. 16.

<sup>197</sup> *Rep.* 435 b (my emphasis).

<sup>198</sup> *Rep.* 435 b.

because consciousness itself is self-contained. God pictures the universe in his Being, of which the world is merely a fallen mirror. A Christian equivalent is the way Anselm of Canterbury (1033 - 1109) describes his proof for the existence of God:

For it is quite possible to think of something whose non-existence cannot be thought of. This must be greater than something whose non-existence can be thought of. So if this thing (*aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest*) can be thought of as not existing, then, that very thing than which a greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. This is a contradiction. So it is true that there exists something than which nothing greater can be thought, that it cannot be thought of as not existing.<sup>199</sup>

Anselm explains that if God does not exist, the idea of God remains, yet the reality of God is absent. The reality of God is greater than the idea of God. Therefore if God is 'that than which no greater thing can be thought,' the idea of God must lead to accepting the reality of God, in that otherwise the mere idea of God is the greatest thing that may be thought. Simply put the *idea* of a thing implies its existence, as well as implying that God places it in one's mind in the first instance. This idea existing, present to the mind, and 'given' by God, confirms its reality, albeit a reality which is not available to the external senses. What has potential meaning in the realm of the material, may be absolute in ontological terms. In terms of God's providence it is impossible to regard anything as absolutely accidental. Nothing happens by chance, and nothing can be contingent in the work of an infinite mind. Gilson observes that

Absolutely speaking, there can be neither chance nor monstrosities for a Christian thinker, for although on the relative plane of human experience these conceptions may and ought to be upheld, they lose all meaning when we set out to describe the universe from the standpoint of God. The ancient conception of the fortuitous is quite familiar to St. Augustine: it is all that which is produced without cause, which depends on no rational order: *qui ea*

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<sup>199</sup> From the *Proslogion* (1079), excerpted by McGrath *op cit.*, pp. 8 - 9.

*dicunt esse fortuita, quae vel nullas causas habent, vel non ex aliquo rationabili ordine venientes* [Augustine DCD 5. 1]. Now in the Christian universe nothing ever happens save in the name of rational order, nothing exists save depending on it. In everyday conversation we may be permitted to speak of chance, but since the world is God's work and nothing it contains is withdrawn from His providence, it is impossible to regard anything as absolutely fortuitous. *Nihil igitur casu fit in mundo*; nothing happens by chance: that is the ultimate Christian attitude to the universal order.<sup>200</sup>

In absolute terms, the fantastical and the hybrids are as impossible as chance, because as nature they are God's creation. Gilson goes on to point out that God does not make mistakes; matter lends itself to form just so far as its author wills. *Defectus naturae* must be God's will, and must have been made with some end in view. Equally, Gilson sees that where Greek thought tolerates an 'indetermination' resulting from a certain lack of rationality, Christian thought 'tightens the bonds of natural determinism by reducing the apparent disorder of nature to the laws of a higher reason. And the converse is equally true. Where Greek thought admits an anti-rational necessity, Christian philosophy casts off the bond of this necessity precisely because it is anti-rational.'<sup>201</sup> Again, in absolute terms the act of bringing chance under Christian laws frees nature from fate, in the sense that everything has a sufficient reason which is none other than Reason itself. Where a major metaphysical difference is that the animal in Greek thought presents an arbitrary signifier which is also a locus for bringing absolute ideal forms out of chaos, in the practical Christian context of understanding the animal in the *DPR*, animals are seen from the commentary tradition, and in particular in a manner similar to Isidore's etymological *explicatio*.<sup>202</sup> The very word animal is intrinsic to the concept of creative depiction of abstract

<sup>200</sup> Gilson 1936 *op cit.*, p. 369.

<sup>201</sup> Gilson 1936 *ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>202</sup> Etymological explanation amplifies the way such abstract images, rhetorically and grammatically configured, might have been conceived by earlier paradigms. Bartolomaeus' Latin *animatus*, for example, is traceable to Aristotle, who uses the Greek *zōon* (ζωον, τό) or 'living creature'. From *zōon* is derived the word *zographos* (ζωγράφος, δ), or a painter who depicts living creatures. In this way 'animal' became, in scholarly usage, a term for art. In Aristotle's own words 'art is the *logos* of the article without the matter' privileging the form over its material materialisation. See *Parts* 40 a., 25.



concepts, and it is particularly appropriate that the earliest uses of the word ‘animal’ in Middle English are to be found in the text of the *DPR*, and specifically in its book eighteen, which aims to inform the reader of the nature of animals by depicting them in a literary bestiary.<sup>203</sup> Trivisa translates animal from Bartholomaeus’ *animatus*, meaning breath, life. Further translation maintains the Aristotelian definition of all breathing life, and Bartholomaeus explains, for example, that ‘Al þat is comprehended of fleissh and of spiryte of lif is ycleped animall, a beast.’ (*DPR* 18. 1).

Dionysius the Areopagite (c. AD 500) expresses a clear preference for a disordered imagery in art such as the *aenigmata* of fantastical creatures which should stimulate the imagination of an audience who should not dwell with the symbol but move to its spiritual realities. Equally, Hugh of Saint Victor explains that the more the simile becomes dissimilar, the more the truth is revealed under the guise of hideous images. What Richard of Saint -Victor described as the ‘analogical signification’ of the celestial hierarchy of Pseudo - Dionysius involves ‘the reason and the imagination, wholly together as mistress and handmaiden’ motivating the early stages of the soul’s ‘journey to God’ but being ‘rejected in the higher reaches of contemplation.’<sup>204</sup> In this way Dionysian thought discourages the superficial anthropomorphism of texts and images, and over reliance on the rational, in favour of the quidditative definition at a particular level of thought. Williams explains that:

In recompense it guarantees that through a proper approach to the image, a real and fulfilling comprehension of the intelligible may be had. Indeed, in Pseudo-Dionysius epistemology as well as in his symbolism, cognition of a thing through its image leads to the experience of the thing, a becoming one with, through the transcendence of the image: “The truth we have to understand is that we use letters, syllables, phrases, written terms and words because of the senses. But when our souls are moved by intelligent

<sup>203</sup> The earliest usage of the word ‘animal’ in the *DPR* is noted in *Middle English Dictionary* ed. by. Hans Kurath & Sherman M. Kuhn (London: University of Michigan Press, 1956).

<sup>204</sup> Minnis & Scott, *op cit.*, p. 169. For an in depth discussion see below, chapter three p. 12 ff.

energies in the direction of the things of the intellect then our senses and all that go with them are no longer needed.”<sup>205</sup>

What Williams highlights in Dionysius’ thought is the way that literary or artistic expressions work at different levels or sense, and that the idea it ultimately expresses is placed higher than the article itself while always remaining dependent upon its initial literal expression for existence. In an age that believed ideal forms offered a greater philosophical resource, that they are in fact more ‘real’ than their particular and individual embodiments, the “symbolic” and “wonderful” animals of Bartholomaeus’ bestiary need no justification at all. Gilson emphasises that they mean what they mean in terms of their metaphorical truth, without any direct reference to empirical proof:

Thanks to its active power, the *intellectus agens* abstracts the universal from the particular, intelligible species from sensible species, essences from actually existing things. Now it is quite certain that universals, intelligible species, and the essences of things are not bound up with any actually existing thing. On the contrary they are quite indifferent to the existence or non - existence of things, they take no account of place or time, so that the existence or non-existence of the thing has nothing to do with our knowledge of it. Thus, just as the intellect may know the essence of a thing by its intelligible species when the thing exists, so also it can know it in the same way even when it does not.<sup>206</sup>

Even in abstraction, Gilson points out, category may to some degree be sought or recognised. It seems a contradiction to suppose that what is nothing can be an object for intellect. But there is a distinction to be made here, in that the object of the intellect is the essence of a non-existing thing. Ockhamist nominalism holds that the real is the individual, and that ideal forms are just that – ideas in the mind. They do not have more reality than the individuals that fall under them, or of which they are

<sup>205</sup> Williams *op cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>206</sup> Gilson 1936 *op cit.*, p. 231.

predicate. For Aristotle, there can be no scientific knowledge of an essence if nothing has the essence, though having grasped the essence through a study of those individuals who have it, we will know the essence after the individuals have ceased. Thus, with imaginary creatures we cannot, have scientific knowledge of the essence, and must rather say that their essence lies elsewhere, and not in one single or particular example. As will be discussed below, the essence of each hybrid may be seen to have mankind as its true prototype or original. Correspondingly, for Bartholomaeus, the object of the intellect is never the being or existence of animals. Rather, the intellect draws on animals as the corresponding concept and does not need to represent the animal either as existing or as not existing. The object of the intellect, as Aristotle propounds and Porphyry rehearses, is thus the *essence* of the thing *independently of its existence*. But the sign is all important because things emanate not from thought to thing, but from thing to thought, their truth being in the human intellect but also in a way in *things* ‘albeit in things as related to the divine intellect.’<sup>207</sup> Another way to extend this discussion - though they are not related, Gilson’s story *not* involving regress where Plato’s is *dependent* upon possible regress - is to rehearse Plato’s ‘third bed’ argument. The argument may be paraphrased thus: the Maker makes only one individual, which is a bed, because *if* he made two there would have to be a third whose form which they in turn would both have. This one - not those two - would be *What Is Bed?*<sup>208</sup> The Form of Bed is made by God the craftsman, and there is only one.<sup>209</sup> There cannot be more than one Form; if there were two, then these two would have the same form, and so there would (*per impossible*) be a further Form of Bed in which they both partook.<sup>210</sup> We call *all* beds ‘beds’ because the word ‘bed’ means the form of the bed, and particular beds are so called because of their relation to the Form of Bed. The existence of the Form of Bed justifies our practice of calling all beds ‘beds’. Animal hybrids, in these terms, may be said to be the second man that God made, being only partly in His image, though both are ‘a beste ilike to God’ (*DPR* 3. 1). They are the same, but never truly identical, being different in aspects of their appearance and in their patent metaphoricity, which

<sup>207</sup> Gilson 1936, *op cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>208</sup> *Rep.*, 597 c.

<sup>209</sup> *Rep.*, *ibid.*, 597 c.

<sup>210</sup> *Rep.*, *ibid.*, 597 c – 597 e.

actively questions their own form. Hybrids, in this way are questions in themselves, and in the terms of Plato's argument the third whose form they take would be, *What Is Man?*

Aquinas' analysis of the relation of essence to genus, species and difference yields a typically dense if illuminating contribution to this discussion:

[N]ature or essence is considered in a second way with reference to the act of existing [*esse*] it has in this or that individual, when the nature is so considered. Something is attributed to it accidentally by reason of the thing in which it exists; for instance, we say man is white because Socrates is white, although being white does not pertain to man as man. [i.e. man as such]

This nature has a twofold act of existing, one in individual things, the other in the mind ... Individual beings, moreover, have numerous acts of existing corresponding to the diversity of individuals. Yet, the nature itself, considered properly - that is to say, absolutely, - demands not of these acts of existing.<sup>211</sup>

For Aquinas the universal concept expressed by words or names exists in the mind: that which is signified exists extra-mentally, though as an individual and not just as a universal. For Aquinas fictitious creatures do not exist potentially. They can't exist if they don't exist, because a species is immortal. This is to say, that is they were created in the mind of God they must always have been, in the first instance. However, in Bartholomaeus treatment they are attended to precisely as substances from which are formed the concepts predicable for each as an individual. As individuals of a God-given substance the properties of things, however abstract, must always in some sense signify their creator. To accept this of the bestiary hybrids is to understand that the *idea* of their reality and identity is placed higher than themselves.

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<sup>211</sup> Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. by Armand Maurer, Mediaeval Sources In Translation Series (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1965) p. 39 ff.

## 2. 6 Are animals fallen?

Why and how is the notion of the fall important to this thesis? While material substances and things may provide a basis for categories and knowledge, in the Christian world they are seen differently, in particular because there is an assumption that things are corrupted after the transgression of Adam and Eve in Eden. Man's fallenness consists, in part, of a habitual lust and appetite, which is equated with the animal side of his nature. In this way, animals in literature often constitute symbols mirroring man's animality. However, the way medieval thought read the book of creation is also in question. Often contradictory positions warrant examination, in order that we understand the status of the animal as a sign for its creator. Augustine, for example, sees creation as fallen, yet also sees it as a theocentric one, in which God is immanent; Langland suggests that man cannot see clearly after the fall, yet presents his dreamer Will with a vision in which perfect animals may be read from a theocentric, unfallen perspective.

Indeed, if animals are 'fallen' in what sense may they, as part of a 'fallen' creation, provide the best sign, and offer what is the most obvious method of Christian debate? By Augustinian definitions reading a fallen creation in terms of morality is suspect because the laws of nature operative in a fallen world would not correspond to God's will. But Aquinas' interpretation (by arguments from design, and of the fall in man as microcosm) distinguishes animals as manifestations of divine providence in a state of innocence. This section examines the Scholastic rejection and redefinition of the Augustinian fall doctrine as an index to scholastic thought, and its relevance as an interpretative strategy for later medieval poetic writing.

The traditional view that all creation falls from God's grace at man's disobedience demonstrates a profound discomfort with the idea that man alone is fallen. On the one hand this question serves to test the overall hypothesis that there are ethical questions

about animals which are repressed from the theology and literature of a Medieval Christian discourse which rejects the importance of animals as created beings. On the other, the *DPR* is important as a text which influences later thought and the production of poetic works, by positing the animal as a sign at the literal level of an encyclopaedia, which offers material for the use of others who will then interpret, moralise, and allegorise. As such it is necessary that we understand something about the status of the creation that is represented. If we understand creation as a fallen one then there may be an inconstancy in the relationship between the animal as sign, and its relation to that which it is said to signify. The belief that all creation is fallen would be a paradox, if it were still thought absolutely to speak of its maker: how could the animal, imperfect as a sign though it might be, signify something from which it is irretrievably separate and corrupted, and which in itself has no opportunity to gain salvation from the results of man's disobedience?

In this context two putative ways to read the placement of the animal is to observe a spiritual as absolute, temporal as contingent distinction. Augustine makes an absolute / contingent distinction between the literal level of scripture as writings of 'outstanding authority' in whose truth we can trust, and all 'other' literal things. If the theological line of truth is literal though, we must also bear witness by our own knowledge to things within our range of senses, but which signify things out of the reach of these senses. Thus, the mental process of reason (*sententia*) presents a second level of understanding where arbitrary signs offer a secondary level involving our interpretation.<sup>212</sup> Do we view a fallen creation (both man *and* beasts) as literally true? Or must we read it from the premise of an allegorically persuasive sign of an all-creative God? Correspondingly, the answer is either or both. In the first instance the fall of creation is true at the literal level of the scriptural text, whose words are absolute; it happened because The Bible - and God its author - says it did. In the temporal context the fall is contingent upon a specific definition of man's relationship to creation. It is a relationship grounded in the idea of man as a microcosm of God who speaks him into being, and who in a sense contains all the cosmos within himself.

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<sup>212</sup> *DCD* 11. 3.

All creation is fallen, though fallen within man as microcosm. Creation and its animals can be seen as separate from this fall' though they reflect man's state being as he is, an animal. But animals retain meaning as signs in a way that only the unfallen could. By these distinctions we may come to understand scholastic interpretations of the fall narrative as both true in a sense *and* allegorically persuasive. Scholastic thought, as represented by Aquinas and Bartholomaeus, offers a clear answer to these questions: a pre-emptive recognition of the problem of reading creation as a sign. Classical theism, or the traditional Augustinian view, teaches that the fallenness of human nature is a state that in principle affects the whole of the created world. But contradictions to the 'classical' understanding of the fall appear as recurrent motifs in *De proprietatibus rerum*. There is an understanding that creation is fallen, and yet an understanding that it only is so in a specific sense. As a result the *DPR* addresses the status of man in relation to the rest of creation in order to predicate the validity of 'things' as an authentic sign for God.

## 2. 7 The Augustinian perspective

A world in which one species has, for its survival, to prey upon and destroy another is not one that we might expect an omnibenevolent God to create.<sup>213</sup> In the beginning it was not. In the garden of Eden man had no need of animals. But with the fall the relationship changes: '*maledicta terra in opere tuo; in laboribus comedes ex ea cunctis diebus vitae tuae*' [cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life] (Gen. 3: 17). By his disobedience man forfeited his easy dominance over other species and the earth degenerated. A further consequence of this conscious disobedience was that Adam and Eve lost health and immortality, would be subject to work, pain, illness and death - and became aware of their sexuality.

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<sup>213</sup> Discussed as a specifically theological problem see Michael Lloyd 'Are animals fallen' in Linzey, A., & Yamamoto, D., (eds.) *Animals on the Agenda: Questions About Animals for Theology and Ethics* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1998) pp. 147 - 161. See also Michael Lloyd 'The Fall' in Paul Barry Clark & Andrew Linzey., Eds., *A Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 370.

Subsequently, humanity, who were all in a way *in Adam* would carry the burden of the fall. 'Every man is his own Adam' (Rom. 5 : 12) was a virulent idea to a society who saw themselves as 'a moral mess, weak of will and prone to lust, envy, greed and every sort of unkind and anti-social behaviour.'<sup>214</sup> Man's chosen free-will, in other words, involved him in choices of good and evil.

The attempt to explain what evil is, and where it came from produced a paradoxical impasse, especially for earlier theologians, for whom the question of whether creation had fallen provides a premise for questions such as, is evil necessarily built into creation? Irenaeus of Lyon's 'On the Origin of Evil' (c.200) sees evil as growing from human frailty. God did not create humanity in perfection but with the capacity *for* perfection through a process of growth. The initial vulnerability of mankind leads to its seduction in Eden: '[H]umanity was a child; and its mind was not yet fully mature; and thus humanity was easily led astray by the deceiver.'<sup>215</sup> Irenaeus is trying to negotiate the paradox that God, despite creating everything, cannot have created evil: Evil is an entity for Irenaeus, and it is the deceiver who manipulates what becomes manifest through human frailty. To account for the occurrence of evil, Irenaeus sees its root in the frailty of the fallen and therefore perverted process of man's development. But this is unsatisfactory, because it doesn't answer the obvious question: if the deceiver is evil pre-existent to the fall, where did the evil that he embodies or incarnates come from? Bishop Athanasius (d. 428) meets the same problem head on when he justifies the incarnation as God's absolute presence on the earth by providing a definition of man as inherently sinful. God must enter the world in the form of the Son, in order that man may be saved from such sin by the sacrifice of the word made flesh. Like Irenaeus, Augustine also asserts the notion that God cannot have produced evil. But unlike Irenaeus Augustine sees evil as a free 'turning-away' from God, rather than an entity in its own right. As 'all good is from God ... hence there is no nature which is not from God ... there is no nature which we admit is sin.'<sup>216</sup> Part of this

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<sup>214</sup> H. J. Lynch., *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (London: Longman Publishing, 1998) pp. 262 - 3.

<sup>215</sup> Irenaeus 'On The Origin Of Evil' in McGrath *op cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>216</sup> Augustine, 'On The Relation of God and Evil.' From *de libero arbitrio*, Trans. by McGrath, *ibid.*, P. 104.



turning away is man's indulgence in his animal nature. In *City of God* Augustine states that the result of man's disobedience is an uncontrollable lust evident in the carnal nature of sexual activity. In Eden man's genitals were servants of his mind and obedient to his will. Anger and lust were not part of man's healthy state and intercourse did not involve the involuntarily excitement of instinctive lust. If he wanted to procreate he could do it with the same control as he could sow seeds in the ground, a faculty lost with the fall. Augustine states:

let us never imagine that it was impossible for the seed of children to be sown without the morbid condition of lust. Instead the sexual organs would have been brought into activity by the same bidding of the will as controlled the other organs ... without feeling the allurements of passion goading him on, the husband would have relaxed on the wife's bosom in tranquillity of mind and with no impairment of the body's integrity.<sup>217</sup>

Augustine's statement assumes that in Eden man had complete control over bodily and sexual functions. Indeed man may aspire to the pre-lapsarian sexual state of harmony (which Augustine assumes and which is *not* mentioned in scripture) where physical lust did not exist. After the fall, though, sexual intercourse becomes an uncontrollable activity. Augustine's description of the intensity of sexual climax and the extinction of mental awareness suggests an almost irrational fear of an epileptic attack on the human body, which can in no way cope with such intense physical effects. Enjoying such a state might be inevitable. However, Augustine's advocacy of the idea that the real sin is habitual lust is drawn from the notion that man is essentially an animal, and that his animal nature may easily detract from his spiritual nature. Indeed, by presenting this explanatory version of man as a reasoning being in his original state Augustine provides an exemplar to which he encourages man to aspire through the resistance of habitual and carnal acts:

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<sup>217</sup> DCD 14, 26.

So intense is the pleasure that when it reaches its climax there is an almost total extinction of mental alertness; the intellectual sentries, as it were, are overwhelmed ... surely such a man would prefer, if possible, to beget children without lust of this kind. For then the parts created for this task would be the servants of his mind, even in their function of procreation, just as the other members are its servants in the various tasks to which they are assigned. They would begin their activity at the bidding of the will, instead of being stirred up by the ferment of lust.<sup>218</sup>

Augustine's analysis is one which concedes that sexual relations could have taken place in Paradise before the fall, but Adam's body was obedient to his will. Anger and lust were not part of man's healthy state and intercourse did not involve involuntarily excitement, or lust. If he wanted to procreate he could do it with the same control as he could sow seeds in the ground. With the Fall Adam rose up against God to escape God's will in favour of his own, ignoring the fact that the existence of his own will depended entirely upon the will of his creator. Man's punishment is to leave the garden of Eden and live in the world independently of God. He will lose control of himself, and at times become like an animal as his mental awareness is extinguished by the carnal acts and lust to which he is subject. For Michel Foucault man's free will and carnal nature are characteristically seditious in opposing an authoritarian system: 'The arrogance of sex is the punishment and consequence of the arrogance of man. His uncontrolled sex is exactly the same as what he himself has been towards God - a rebel.'<sup>219</sup> For Augustine, in contrast, man would never consciously aspire to a condition where his reason would be compromised by his animality. But there is clearly a sense in which Augustine sees man's fall as one in which he realises his animality, evidenced in the unthinking sexuality of his animal desires. During his lifetime Augustine persuaded the majority of Christians that sexual desire and death are essentially 'unnatural' and that through an act of will Adam and Eve changed the structure of the cosmos, their will corrupting all of nature. The implication of

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<sup>218</sup> DCD 14, 16.

<sup>219</sup> J. R. Carrette. ed., *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (Manchester University Press. 1999) pp. 185 - 6.

Augustine's argument is that creation is fallen absolutely. His doctrine of the fall thus requires and affirms a belief in the free-will of the creatures whom it regards as responsible for rebelling against the creator, and disrupting the harmony which was His intended creation. It is both an affirmation of God's goodness and a denial of His responsibility for evil and suffering.

## 2. 8 The scholastic rejection: Thomas Aquinas' argument from design.

Genesis presents an innocence which is inconceivable, but which seemed evident in the harmony of natural signs. Brian Murdoch observes that 'fallen mankind cannot imagine what it is to be naked and unashamed, and this leads to logical impasses for theological and secular literary writers alike.'<sup>220</sup> These 'logical impasses' may be seen to resolve with Aquinas' rejection of the idea of a complete fall in favour of seeing animals as allegorically persuasive signs of a benevolent God. In the *Summa Theologiae* he objects to the opinions of some that from being originally tame animals became wild and aggressive because of the fall, stating that '*Non enim per peccatum hominis natura animalium est mutata.*'<sup>221</sup> In this question, Aquinas is explaining why there is a natural antipathy between some animals, going as far as to point out that according to Genesis (1. 29 - 30) all creation would have herbage to eat, but that natural antagonism must still have existed between animals as part of their design. He does not think that things were very different before the fall. But in examining one question he has to deal with another, namely that if the fall of creation was an all-encompassing cosmological event, as Augustine insists, semiotics would be seriously compromised by the fact that there would be no direct line from present reality to interpreting God. Aquinas understands from Augustine [*De Genesi ad litteram libri ix.* 14] that the essential goodness of creation and the value of each kind of creature in itself is signified by the fact that God led the animals to man, that he might give them

<sup>220</sup> Brian Murdoch, *Adam's Grace: fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) p. 21.

<sup>221</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, cura et studio Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis S. pii Pp. V issu confectum recognita, 5 vols. (Ottawa: 1941 - 1945) part 1, Q 96, art. 1, ad 2.

names expressive of their respective natures: '*Quod significatum est per hoc quod Deus ad eum animalia adduxit, ut eis nomina imponeret, quae eorum naturas designant.*'<sup>222</sup> Aquinas explains that creation is essentially good (Gen 1.21), but it is provided for man's use. In the beginning animals were provided by God so that man could have experiential knowledge of their nature, and of His nature in turn. If providentially indeterminate, or in any way random in their behaviour, animals would be an empty sign because they would no longer maintain the purpose of their original design, and the intentions of their creator. Indeed random behavioural patterns would suggest a free will which would go against the assertion that animals have no *logos* or *ratio* in the human sense. If animals had fallen and become entirely corrupted as signs, they would no longer offer the 'experiential knowledge' provide by the essential determination of each animal nature, existing as it does to inform the highest quidditatively definable level of its species, man. Even as in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection, so in Eden man considered other animals, and with the benefit of reason understood himself: '*Sicut enim in generatione rerum intelligitur quidam ordo quo proceditur de imperfecto ad perfectum*'.<sup>223</sup> Aquinas explains that in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection, and referring to Aristotle, sees the essential purpose of the animal as informing that which is rationally above it: 'If then nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all of them for the sake of man.'<sup>224</sup> In these terms the proper end of animals is to nourish man's knowledge of Creation. Elsewhere Aquinas makes the same clarification:

For a creature's shaping and conditioning indicate that it *comes from* somewhere; its specific form indicates its maker's *word* as a house's shape indicates its architect's idea; and its functional order indicates its maker's *love* as a house's uses indicate what its architect willed.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>222</sup> ST part 1, Q 91, 1, ad 3.

<sup>223</sup> ST part 1, Q 96, 1, cf., Q 64, ad 1.

<sup>224</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, Trans. by Sinclair. T. A., (London: Penguin, 1981) I.iii. 1256 b pp. 78 - 79.

<sup>225</sup> ST 1991Q 93. 6., p 144.

Aquinas makes a distinction between the natural subjection of the animal to its superior and what the purpose of this subjection is. In the state of innocence, before man had disobeyed, nothing disobeyed him that was naturally subject to him. While the nature of animals was not changed by man's sin, for his disobedience to God man was punished by the disobedience of the animals: '*inobedientia ad hominem eorum quae ei debent eius, eo quod ipse fuit inobediens Deo*'.<sup>226</sup> While in his state of innocence, Aquinas asserts, man had no need to make use of animals for clothes or as food. All he would take from them was the experimental knowledge of their natures, the purpose for which God made them. Reading the animals of Genesis on these terms, they appear to be more like fable animals, designed by an author to serve as illustrative exemplars. Genesis animals present themselves to man to be named - though not to be eaten.<sup>227</sup>

For Aquinas' human ascendancy is subject to a divine plan in which nature, and each animal in particular, is *designed* to serve a purpose. In Eden this was to inform man about his creator, Man's mastership over plants and inanimate things consisted not in commanding or in changing them, but in making use of them without hindrance: '*et sic etiam homo in statu innocentiae dominabatur plantis et rebus inanimatis, non per imperium vel immutationem, sed absque impedimento utendo eorum auxilio*'.<sup>228</sup>

After fall and flood, all that changes is the way man's mastership is applied. Animals become a commodity. In a mainstream understanding Bartholomaeus states that - 'bestes beþ y-ordeiynede nought oonliche for mete ... [but] ymade to relieve and helpe þe neede of many manere infirmities of mankynde.' (DPR 18. 1). Elsewhere, when he addresses the lawful treatment of animals, Aquinas interprets their use in terms of original intended purpose, observing that there is no sin in using a thing for the purposes of which it is. Animals still retain their 'meaning' as a transcript of divine

<sup>226</sup> ST part 1, Q 96, 1.

<sup>227</sup> '*Dixitque Deus: Ecce dedi vobis omnem herbam afferentem semen super terram, et universa ligna quae habent in semetipsis sementem generis sui, ut sint vobis in escam et cunctis ammantibus terrae omnique volucris caeli, et universes quae moventur in terra et in quibus est anima vivens ut habeant ad vescendum. Et factum est ita*' (Gen. 1. 29 - 30). '*Dixit quoque Dominus Deus: Non est bonum esse hominem solum; faciamus ei adiutorium simile sibi. Formatis igitur Dominus Deus de humo cunctis animantibus terrae et universis volatilibus caeli, adduxit ea ad adam, ut videret quid vocaret ea ...*' (Gen. 2. 18 - 19)

<sup>228</sup> ST part 1, Q 96. 2

goodness. And while they are innocent victims of man's sin, man is innocent of parasitism because he has already been granted the 'use' of animals by God.

What Aquinas' distinction highlights is that if animals *were* fallen, they would no longer fulfil their purpose as meaningful Sign. They might be contingently useful. But reading a fallen creation in terms of morality would be highly suspect at best, for the laws of nature operative in this *fallen* world would not correspond to the will of God and the Christian reader of creation could *not* assume creation as a textbook for moral reference because it would be morally imperfect. But as God's intention was to create all things good animals must be objects of value for man's knowledge and a signifier for their creator, continuing to exist with His approval, which they do existing meaningfully to demonstrate His benevolence of intention toward man. The design premise, in other words, must encompass the fall as a means to an unchanging providential end within which things have inherent value. D. C. Greetham comments that 'all the peculiar animals and peoples which populate the geography of the *DPR* ... are part of the variety of kind, and all serve God's will since they behave according to the rules of their kind.'<sup>229</sup> Greetham is pointing out that by the design premise all animals – including fantastical ones – have a God - given design, and serve the purpose of illustrating an aspect of God's character. In the beginning man had a better knowledge, though having fallen he can no longer attain that knowledge in its entirety. God, in his capacious providence, knows the true nature of each individual component of his creation. But after the fall mankind lacks God's sublimely analytic vision. In this way the design premise means that Reality remains always and indivisibly the same. Man's perspective, on the other hand, changes, becomes mutable and contingent, and his vision of animals and their nature clouded after the fall.

## 2. 9 The microcosm - macrocosm relationship

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<sup>229</sup> Greetham *op cit.*, p. 675.

Aquinas' argument from design provides an understanding of the way in which the animal is understood as a sign in a fallen world, though it never questions that there was a fall. It does, however, imply a different version of the fall from the traditional Augustinian one in which the whole cosmos is affected by man's first disobedience. It might be asked, what version of the fall did Aquinas propound?

Aquinas provides a scholastic rejection of the early fall doctrine which involves an absolute / contingent distinction. The fall is seen on two levels; in a contingent sense all things are fallen, though in an unconditional sense man alone is fallen. Aquinas makes this distinction by observing a macrocosm – microcosm correspondence, where man has within him all things over which he can be master. In this sense Aquinas sees that man has authority over all things:

*Dicendum quod in homine quodammodo sunt omnia; et ideo secundum modum quo dominatur his quae in seipso sunt, secundum hunc modum competit ei dominari aliis. Est autem in homine quatuor considerare, scilicet rationem, secundum quam convenit cum angelis; vires sensitivas, secundum quas convenit cum animalibus; vires naturales, secundum quas convenit cum plantis; et ipsum corpus, secundum quod convenit cum rebus inanimatis. Ratio autem in homine habet locum dominantis, et non subiecti dominio. Unde homo angelis non dominabatur in primo statu; et quod dicitur omni creaturae, intelligitur quae non est ad imaginem Dei. Viribus autem sensitivis, sicut irascibili et concupiscibili, quae aliquantulum obediunt rationi, dominatur anima imperando. Unde in statu innocentiae animalibus aliis per imperium dominabatur. Viribus autem naturalibus, et ipsi corpori homo dominabatur non quidem imperando, sed utendo. Et sic etiam homo in statu innocentiae dominabatur plantis et rebus inanimatis, non per imperium vel immutationem, sed absque impedimento utendo eorum auxilio.*<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> ST part 1. Q 96, 2, corpus.

Aquinas explains that in a sense man is the master of what is within himself. In the same way he can have mastership over other things, which are also contained within his being. He describes four things that man has within himself; reason [*rationem*] which makes him like angels; sensitive powers [*vires sensitivas*] which make him like the animals; natural powers [*vires naturales*] which liken him to plants; and his body [*ipsum corpus*] which contains them, and which is like inanimate things. Within man reason is the master and not subject, in the same way that man had no mastery over angels in Eden because of their superior intellect. From this Aquinas deduces that when we read ‘all creatures’ we must understand this to mean those *not* made in God’s image. Over the sensible powers [*irascibili et concupiscibili*] which obey reason in some degree, the soul has mastery by commanding. So in the state of innocence man had mastery over the animals by commanding them, though over the natural powers and the body itself, man is master not by commanding but by using them. Thus in Eden [*statu innocentiae*] man’s mastery of plants and inanimate things consisted not in commanding or in changing them, but in making use of them without hindrance [*impedimento*]. Aquinas’ discussion here works on two levels. He speaks literally, and defends the notion that man has dominion over all things corporeal. But, in line with the argument from design which he makes, he must grant that animals are signs which retain some integrity. By speaking metaphorically of man as a microcosm, he allows that events may happen within man which do not threaten the integrity of other aspects of creation.

This thought is not new to Aquinas, being developed by earlier theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyon, who sees all things in man and God, and uses Christ to make an anti-Gnostic, non-dualistic point that Jesus was of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father:

For the creator of the world is truly the Word of God: and this is our lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, and who in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things: and



therefore He came to his own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that he might sum up all things in himself.<sup>231</sup>

As Irenaeus understands the concept, Jesus is the same substance as God, though manifest on earth. But as a man Jesus also contains all, in the way that God contains all. Man became microcosm as he was spoken into being in the similitude of his creator: '*Et ait: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*' (Gen. 1. 26). Man exists amongst the elements which make up his being as they do the world itself. But these elements are also within him. Isidore of Seville says that 'all things are contained in man, and in him exist the nature of all things'<sup>232</sup> and in his *Elucidarium* Honorius of Autun states that: 'Man is a little world composed of four elements. ... [Man] ... represents the world in summarised form, is dependent on the cosmic forces, which are combined in his make-up in the same proportions as in the universe at large.'<sup>233</sup>

The metaphor of the human body as a universe in literary conception certainly comes from the platonic school's continuous production of likeness out of the analogy of the human body to the cosmos. 'Our world must necessarily be a likeness of something', says Timaeus.<sup>234</sup> The search for that something gives rise to the notion of an infinite regress of likeness beginning with men and proceeding all the way to the eternal principle. In medieval thought this is best expressed by Bernardus Silvestris' (c.1150) '*De mundi universitate sive megacosmus at microcosmus*' in his *Cosmographia*. In book one, or *Megacosmus*, the figure of Natura complains to Noys - the image of living life [*vite viventis ymago*] - that the confusion of primary matter which has come out of chaos is intolerable.<sup>235</sup> We are told by Natura that God is wholly beyond the

<sup>231</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon 'Against Heresies' in *The Writings of Irenaeus*, trans. by A. Roberts and H. Rambaut, Clark's Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868) Vol. 1, v, 18, 3. pp. 105 - 6.

<sup>232</sup> Isidore of Seville, as cited in P. Brehant, *An Encyclopaedia of the Dark Ages: Isidore of Seville* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1964) p. 62.

<sup>233</sup> Seznek, J., *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1972) pp. 104, 49.

<sup>234</sup> Barkan, Leonard, *Natures Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) p. 10.

<sup>235</sup> Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. by Peter Donke (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), '*megacosmus*' 1. 4.

reach of the cosmos<sup>236</sup> and is a splendour that brings forth darkness without form. In response Noys divides the four elements, and places the earth at the centre of the universe. But it is in book two, or *Microcosmus*, that Noys tells Natura that man will bring the cosmic design to its consummation, as the first element which combines all other within a living body:

*Extimum telluns globum sapiens genus homo, quem pergimus fabricatum,  
digno possederit incolatu. Porro sedem mundi median genus insistit tercium,  
de extiemorum proprietate val participatione confectum. Participat enim  
angelice creationis numerus cum siderum divinitate quod non moritur,  
participabit cum homine quod passionum affectibus incitatur.*<sup>237</sup>

Noys glories in the beauty of the universe and, in an allegorised version of Genesis, takes the things of the cosmos and completes it by creating man. Man is made from the cosmos. While the firmament has stars of fire as its angels, we are told, earth will soon have impassioned man. Bernard is not afraid to utilise and allegorise ‘pagan’ material and as a result he was known negatively as a cryptopagan, though this seems an unfair criticism given that his allegory is transparently Christian, and written at a time when pagan literature and mythology no longer constituted a threat to Christianity. The fact that his *Cosmographia* is one of a number of similar works, such as the *Microcosmus* of Geoffrey of Saint-Victor, also indicates the genre and subject matter to have been widespread and accepted, and macrocosm / microcosm correspondence to be well understood.

In terms of man’s soul, immateriality and spiritual completion mean that nothing may be given or taken away. In his fallen state, however, man is subject to a constant interaction with forces other than his own reason, which dictate his actions by acting upon him. This is recognisable in the recurrent figure of the goddess *Fortuna*, who can give and take from man in the corporeal context. From Hellenic thought, too, comes

<sup>236</sup> Bernardus Silvestris *op cit.*, *megacosmus* 2. 13, ‘ex superantissimus extrammundus, superessentialis.’

<sup>237</sup> Bernardus Silvestris *op cit.*, *Microcosmus* 7. 4.

the idea that the ‘influences’ which radiate from the Heavenly bodies effect the human body, which contains all four elements in the form of humours. These influences, playing upon the elements, dictate man’s behaviour, temperament and character. Aristotle understands man to be not just a rational being but a rational animal, perceptive and logical but also, in his corporeal context, a biological, elemental entity. ‘Like is in fact acted upon by like ... the same organs contain fire, earth and the other elements, which are the objects of perception either in themselves or through their accidents.’<sup>238</sup> The elements which exist by nature are ‘those things are natural which undergo continuous change, starting from an intrinsic source of change and concluding at a particular end.’<sup>239</sup> Such understandings supply Aquinas with a basis on which he can observe man’s mastership to be essentially over himself.

Where in book five of the *DPR* man’s corporeal context, involves comparative statements about the differing functions of organs among man and beasts, in book three Bartholomaeus observes that man is essentially rationale (*Logos*): ‘Isider seiþ þat a man is a best iliche to God ...’ (*DPR* 3. 1). In spite of himself, man has a foot in both camps and straddles *anima* and animal. He is inseparable from beasts:

Isider spekeþ of double maner man, of þe inner man and vtter man (*DPR* 3. 1) ... [*De diffinitione anime rationalis*] þe resonable soule þat we wole speke of in þis doynge is diffined of somme seintis and philosophis as a spirit [of somme as a soul,] and of somme opir as anima et spiritus ‘soule and spirit.’

(*DPR* 3. 2).

...

A soule is an vnbodili substaunce intellectual þat fongiþ schinyng of þe firste be þe laste relacioun. By þis diffinicioun know we [þe] firste and chef propirte of þe soule, for mannes spirit fongiþ þe schinyng of God next aftir

<sup>238</sup> Aristotle, *De anima* ed. & trans. by Michael Durrant (London: Routledge, 1993) II. 416 b, 32., cf., III. 435 a, 11.

<sup>239</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) II, 8, 199 b, 16 - 17.

angels. Also in þat he is a soule he is diffined in tweye maners. For he is ioyned to þe body in tweye maners, þat is to menyng, as meure to þe body in imeved, and also as a schipman is i-oned to þe schip.

(*DPR* 3. 3).

As already discussed, definition of man must begin with his animality in the corporeal context. What Bartholomaeus calls the ‘double mannered man’ is both ‘soule’ and animal. As a rational animal man’s chief goal is to want to be like God, taking his place ‘next aftir angels’ (*DPR* 3. 2). On the other hand the soul is anchored to the material: ‘ioyned to þe body in tweye maners’ which defines the soul as mover to the moved, and which must take control the body. In this context it is the macrocosm - microcosm relationship which makes the *DPR* a specifically Christian text. Though he does not discuss the fall directly Bartholomaeus observes man as a microcosm in book eight, *De mundo*. He sees the world as a sphere made of elements. There are three perspectival levels from which to read the world. Firstly, God is understood in the world that He made: ‘as Boys seip: þow bringest forþ alle þinge of hey ensample, þow fairest: berest in þi mynde þe fairest worlde and makest and worchist by a lik ymage.’ (*DPR* 8: 1). The second world is the world as it is made up of the things of the cosmos and the elements:

as heuen in þe whiche þe sterre[s] schineþ, and fyre þat hetip al þinge, ayer by þe whiche alle þing þat haþ lif breþeþ and þryueþ, watir þat biclippeþ þe sides of þerþe, erthe þat susteyneþ and holdeþ vp and fedip al þis lowe þinges.

(*DPR* 8: 1).

The third world is man himself: ‘for he schewip in himself likeness of al þe worlde ... þe thridde worlde is somdel euerlastinge and somdel passing, beringe in hitself licness of all þinges.’ (*DPR* 8: 1). It is what is seen and felt in these worlds that is important for Bartholomaeus. The likeness of bodily properties to their correspondences allow an understanding of ‘þe vnseye þingis of God beþ iseye and iknowe by þingis þat beþ

imade and vnderstonde.’ (*DPR* 8. 1). Again this enforces the hypothesis that creation *is* fallen but it is so in a specific way, being so in man as a microcosm, where his fall and subsequent free will are solely responsible for his condition. As signs, animals and ‘things’ retain their integral design in correspondence with the original Will of the creator, being separate from this fall. To ask whether creation is fallen, Scholastic thought returns not merely the question, what exactly *is* creation? but asks at what level and on what terms it may be understood. In one sense at least man as a microcosm of creation presents an immediate and convenient example in which all things are present, and ‘ruled’ by the intellect which is distinct to man, and by which all other animals are quidditatively defined. The reason which makes man distinct from animals is what, for Aquinas, controls the things of the cosmos. For this reason, there is a sense in which man is fallen by his own free will, though the present really remains unchanged.

The revision of Augustine’s semiotics of the fall and interpretative approaches to creation as a sign for its creator by Aquinas demonstrates an anxiety with the way animals, and man’s relationship to them, are read. It is significant that animals in particular are the focus of this revision. Where man’s fall is of cosmological significance the understanding that this is contingent, indeed contained within, allows creation to be read as a coherent unity where perception changes while a designed totality remains constant. At the literal level it would seem a necessity that if a straightforward line is drawn from present reality to God’s purpose, animals can not be seen to have fallen, because the cosmos which falls is the one which man alone encircles. As contemporary theological values, such ideas are expressed and explored in Middle English literature, in a way that Aquinas’ theology may never engage with, and in the following chapter I will show how important the displacement and placement of the animal in theological works is to the understanding of a man and animal in medieval literature.

## CHAPTER THREE

## BEAST FABLES

*Omnis mundi creatura  
Quasi liber, et pictura  
Nobis est, et speculum.  
Nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis  
Nostrae status, nostrae sortis.  
Fidele signaculum.*  
Alan of Lille<sup>240</sup>

### 3. 1 *Signa pro rebus*: Augustine's sign theory and contemporary theological values

This chapter develops the thesis that a fundamental difference between theology and literature is medieval literature's capacity to theorise positions that are not theorised and explored in commentary, and theological discourses. It does so in relation to representations of animals in medieval fiction, where often simplistic doctrinal statements become available to interpretation. Because doctrine often varies between commentators, texts and times, doctrine itself may be seen as contingent, and a bad reflection of scripture. In contrast the literary text may delimit doctrine by the rhetorical strategies which allow exploration of an idea in a controlled or guided manner. Such an analysis reveals the way in which the animal is displaced from moral consideration in doctrine, and re-examined in literature. The broad nature of so general a thesis is potentially problematic from a historical (or even New Historicist) perspective, a point made by R. J. Lyall, who recognises that interpretations of

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<sup>240</sup> Alan of Lille, in *PL*, 210. 579. B., cited in Gillian. R. Evans, *Alan of Lille: The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983) p. 151, and in English translation by Minnis and Scott as 'Every creature in the world is like a book or a picture to us, and a mirror; a faithful representation of our life, our death, our condition, our end.' Minnis *et al*, 1986, *op cit.*, p. 171.

Augustine in the twelfth century are inevitably different to those of the fifteenth century.<sup>241</sup> Accordingly, modern scholarship should not be surprised by discrepancies between the understanding of statements in their original context and that of a fifteenth - century poet.

There is a sense, however, in which broad, central lines of Augustinian thinking retain unity and are omnipresent in later medieval thought.<sup>242</sup> His sign theory, for example, deals expressly with the contingency of all signs, and may be summed-up by the word *interiority* or inwardness. This interiority, which encompasses three interrelated concepts of the inner self, inward turns, and outward signs as expressions of inner things is surprisingly akin to what we now broadly term post-structuralist theory and criticism. For Augustine, as for post-structuralism, meaning is not inherent in words, things – or animals. Rather there is a plurality and the openness of all signs to a multiplicity of interpretations, none of which can be either correct or incorrect. For Augustine, however, this contingency may be overcome, fixity of meaning attained, and the ‘transcendental signified’ found. In the medieval paradigm, while the play of meaning is endlessly fallen and contingent, individuals who have faith may be guided, and turn inward to find illumination. At the centre of the Christian self ‘*différance*’ is delimited, the *Logos* found, and God’s meaning revealed. Thus, the process of reading creation for Augustine requires and assumes a meaning system which is fideistically enclosed: have faith in God and understanding will follow. Correspondingly, reading things and words in a medieval world requires its subjects to utilise what may be termed the free – ranging hermeneutic of a comprehensive system of interrelated meanings or, as Alistair Fowler puts it: ‘Medieval literature has an endless fascination. It lies at an extreme edge of

<sup>241</sup> See R. J. Lyall, ‘Henryson, the hens and the Pelagian fox: a poet and the intellectual currents of his age’, in *Medieval Scottish Literature*, ed. Sally Mapstone (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, *forthcoming*). Lyall provides important contextual material, and in particular his discussion of Neo-Augustinianism in Scotland as a reaction to a late revival of Pelagianism, generates a precise political reading of Robert Henryson’s (c. 1450 – c.1505) *Morall Fabillis* (c.1470). For a broader discussion of this approach see Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) pp. 1 - 7. For a specific discussion of Neo-Augustinianism, see H. A. Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe*, trans. D. Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) pp. 67-110.

<sup>242</sup> A writer such as Henryson is, of course, composing fiction while Augustine and Aquinas deal with the realm of theology. There is an essential medieval distinction here, which Henryson highlights and plays with quite wittily – discussed below. The gap between the two is of questionable size, given Augustine’s argument that all words, being contingent, may never represent actuality. While a different code is required in each case it is also true to say that both require the freedom of a free ranging hermeneutic in each chosen context. Henryson goes to great length to define the figurative nature of his fables, where the human audience would see themselves reflected in animals. The doctrinal commonplace of comparing man with animal, for example, extends to the figurative, or metaphorical, in a context where the two are combined to draw attention to the similarity between human and animal conditions by the use of strategic representations of verbal relationships.

our historical reach. And it opens a strange, ceremonious world – hierarchically ordered, comprehensively meaningful – whose ideals at least, are in some respects superior to those of the modern world.<sup>243</sup> As a consequence, it is surprising that Augustine's sign theory is so little referred to by modern literary theorists, while being comparable to, if not rather more eloquent than, its modern theoretical counterparts.

As Augustine has such a profound influence upon the way the animal is defined, understanding literary attitudes to animals in this period requires some analysis of his thought. He influences medieval attitudes to creation. But he also influences the way that creation is read, his understanding of fallen things as fallen signs forming theological attitudes by the very exclusion of the animal. For Augustine Man is a microcosm whose rationale encapsulates the rationale of God, and whose ability to see is what makes him different from other animals. But Augustine's version of the fall paradoxically suggests that creation is a coherent totality, viewed by man through the impaired vision of his fallen perspective.

### 3. 1 (a) Literary theory and interiority

Augustine's sign theory may be summed up by the word *interiority* or inwardness. Interiority for Augustine encompasses three interrelated concepts: the inner self, inward turns or revolution, and outward signs as expressions of inner things. Correspondingly Augustine's thought can be seen to establish firstly the concept of the self as a private inner space.<sup>244</sup> Secondly, he develops the notion of personal revolution and illumination by which we turn into this inner space to look for God - the theological project of *Confessions*: 'into myself I went [to discover] the unchangeable light of the Lord.'<sup>245</sup> Thirdly, he develops the

<sup>243</sup> Alistair Fowler, *A History of English Literature: Forms and Kinds from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) p. 29.

<sup>244</sup> In *Confessions* Augustine states: 'Behold, in those innumerable fields, and dens, and caves of my memory, innumerable full of innumerable kinds of things, brought in, first, either by the images, as all bodies are: secondly, or by the presence of things themselves, as the arts are: thirdly, or by certain notions and impressions, as the affections of the mind are.' St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by W. Watts, Loeb Parallel Editions series, 2 vols., (London: W. Heinmann, 1912) 10. 17.

<sup>245</sup> C 7. 10, 16



conception of both words and sacrament as outward signs expressing inner realities.<sup>246</sup> In addition, metaphor in *De doctrina christiana* is itself defined as a kind of sign where things signified by appropriate terms are usurped by others signifying something else.<sup>247</sup> For Augustine a spiritual metaphor allows the usurpation and transformation of the things of the world - which are carnal [*carnaliter*] or literal - once we reflect on, and understand, their meaning through the grid of anagogic reflexivity.

Augustine's interior world not only contains images of the exterior world, but also contains the very reality (*res ipsa*) of intelligible things.<sup>248</sup> It is not just a private world, therefore, but the world of eternal truth – in literary terms the realm of the potential – where the soul finds intelligible truth and ultimately the one eternal Truth which is God by turning to the divine mind (Plotinian *Nous*) articulated first in *De Libero arbitrio*,<sup>249</sup> though most commonly cited in *Confessions*.<sup>250</sup>

In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine uses a nut and kernel metaphor to illustrate the difference between literal and figurative levels of representation: 'inside its attractive shell

<sup>246</sup> In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine states that: 'Given signs are those which living things give to each other, in order to show, to the best of their ability, the emotions of their minds or anything they have felt or learnt. .... It is this category of signs – to the extent that it applied to humans – that I have decoded to examine and discuss, because even the divinely given signs have been communicated to us by the human beings who wrote them.' *DDoC* 2. 2, 3 - 4. In the second instance, the Old Testament sacrifice of animals should be seen as a symbol, says Augustine, 'God is saying in effect "Had I needed such things I certainly would not have applied to you for them, seeing that I have them in my power."' *DCD* 10. 5.

<sup>247</sup> In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine states that 'there are two reasons why written texts fail to be understood: their meaning may be veiled either by unknown signs or by ambiguous signs. Signs are either literal or metaphorical. They are called literal when used to signify the things for which they were invented: so for example, when we say *bovem*, meaning the animal which we and all speakers of Latin call by that name. They are metaphorical when the actual thing which we signify by the particular words are used for something else.' *DDoC* 2. 10, 15.

<sup>248</sup> In *Confessions* Augustine observes: 'For surely the things themselves are not let into the memory, but the images of them only are with an admirable swiftness caught in, and in most wonderful cabinets stored up; whence they are most wonderfully fetched out again by the act of remembering.' ... 'I have perceived with all the senses of my body those numbers which we name in counting; but those numbers by which we count, are far different, not only are they the images of these, and therefore they have a real existence' (*C* 10. 9, & 10. 12).

<sup>249</sup> Augustine states: 'I think that by reason we comprehend that there is a certain interior sense to which all things are referred by these five well know senses' [*arbitror ratione comprehendere esse interiorem quemdam sensum*] ... 'For, as has been said, he would not be sure that he wants to be wise, and that he ought to be, unless that notion of wisdom were inherent in his mind' [*nisi notio sapientiae menti ejus in haereret*]. *DLA* 2. 3, & 2. 15.

<sup>250</sup> 'I entered even into mine own inwards ... and with the eyes of my soul, over my mind, the unchangeable light of the Lord.' (*C* 7. 10). 'I had by this time found the unchangeable and true eternity of truth, residing above this changeable mind of mine' (*C* 7. 17). 'But another faculty there is ... commanding the eye not to hear, the ear not to see, but the eye not for me to see by, and this for me to hear withal; assigning what is proper to the other senses severally, in their own seats and offices; which being diverse through every sense, yet I the soul being but one, do actuate and govern. I will, I say, mount beyond this faculty of mine.' *C* 17. 7.

this husk is a jangle of fine sounding stones: but it is the food of pigs, not men.'<sup>251</sup> In his use of this particular metaphor it can be seen that Augustine is devaluing interpretation which involves the literal sense alone and where the sign is seen ambiguously as thing (*signa pro rebus*). Against this, he values the interpretation of the more significant figural meaning, citing Paul as his authority: '*littera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivificat*', the letter kills but the spirit gives life [2 Cor. 3:6]. Neither, though, has set or fixed meaning:

for at the outset, you must be very careful lest you take figurative expression literally. What the apostle says pertains to this problem: "for the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth." That is, when that which is said figuratively is taken as though it were literal, it is understood carnally [*carnalia*]. Nor can anything more appropriately be called the death of the soul than that condition in which the thing which distinguishes us from beasts, which is understanding, is subjected to the flesh in the passing of the letter [*hoc est, intelligentia carni subicitur secundo litteram*].<sup>252</sup>

Augustine refers to the delusory nature of corporeal things in a fallen world, and in the context that he has constructed he poses the question of how we learn or understand anything from a creation which is irretrievably fallen. His answer, stated initially in *De magistro*, is that those with faith become the subjects of divine illumination: while earthly teachers can never actually teach anything absolute (*simpliciter*), they may assist the pupil to see truth not by didactic narratives but by dialectic dialogue involving choices facilitated by a fortunate fall. The only true teacher, Augustine points out, is the *logos* or 'inner word' that sets standards and mediates human choices of ascent and dissent. The logical conclusion for Augustine is that Christ alone is our true teacher.

One who hears [a teacher] likewise sees those things with an inner and undivided eye, he knows the matter of which I speak by his own contemplation, not by means of words. Hence, I do not teach even such a one although I speak what is true and he sees what is true. For he is taught not by words, but by the realities themselves made manifest to him by God revealing them to his inner self.<sup>253</sup>

<sup>251</sup> *DDoC* 3. 2.

<sup>252</sup> *DDoC* 3. 5.

<sup>253</sup> *Dma* 40

The soul is seen as the recipient of divine truth whether this is by experience of the 'real' by *scientia* or knowledge through the senses, or in abstraction to words [*littera*] which would enable *sapientia* or wisdom from the contemplation of God. The student must employ reasonable discrimination to perceive arbitrary and attenuant words and signs while inwardly he comes to understand by internal truth and illumination by the grace of God.<sup>254</sup> A reader of signs should have faith, and understanding will follow. In this respect the nut and kernel metaphor used in *De magistro* is a metaphor about how we read, and implies that religious allegory and doctrine is itself the literary representation of the contemplative practice which occupies the mental space.

Augustine can be seen to draw on his Neoplatonic understanding of the way the infinite should not be conceptualised in such a way that it becomes finite. The nutshell represents a dichotomy between the literal and the doctrine or moral it contains. As a finite conceptualisation God cannot be perceived in worldly things - even if he is in a sense, in them - because words would *fix* the transcendent into concepts, actualising them in the fallen world. As soon as the concept can be summed up in a nutshell it becomes measurable, opens up new - even literary - discourses, and becomes inadequate to represent the transcendent reality. Once that which we can only glimpse becomes fixed in a phrase, we are stuck with the finite phrase, and not the infinite concept.<sup>255</sup> The concept of the 'One' as defined in Neoplatonic thought is attained by pushing beyond all that exists or can be conceived in the created world, being ontologically prior to the Being which comes from it. Since it transcends this being the One approximates that which is prior to thought and language and can never be full grasped by the intellect. In the *Enneads* we are told:

If the One - name and reality expressed was to be taken positively it would be less clear than if we did not give it a name at all: for perhaps this name was given it in order that the seeker, beginning from this which is completely indicative of

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<sup>254</sup> For a useful discussion in full on this understanding and its uses see Åke Bergvall, *The "Enabling of Judgement": Sir Philip Sidney and the Education of the Reader*, Ph.D. thesis at the University of Uppsala 1989 (Sweden: Uppsala, 1989) pp. 84.

<sup>255</sup> For a rigorous discussion see K. Guthrie *op cit.*, (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1988) pp. 8 - 11.

simplicity, may finally negate this as well, because, though it was given as well as possible by the giver, not even this is worthy to manifest that nature.<sup>256</sup>

The problem for Porphyry is that as soon as the One is conceptualised or named by the individual, what cannot be limited has been given a form in the mind, which will then prohibit that individual from even attaining unity with the One, thus developing the idea that the One exists prior to and independently of Being or Intellect, and established the identity of intellect and thought with its objects. Porphyry argued that everything that did not seem to be the One was in fact an appearance of the One resulting from our inability to think the One as it truly is. In fact the One can not be said to be any individual thing, as this fixity would limit launching to the realm of mind, and instantly 'block' the attainment of the One. In terms of material things such as animals, then, God may be in all finite things, but this is still problematic, because the infinite cannot be fixed conceptually, grammatically, nor literately. As such animals could only be seen as metonyms, or parts of, the Creator.

In summary, it can be seen that for Augustine, Truth is superior to the human intellect, and is not constructable by the human mind.<sup>257</sup> From this position animals as signs have only limited meaning; indeed, a text which used animals to indicate some fundamental truth would merely provide material for reflection: 'for medieval thinkers reading was rarely an end in itself, most often it was conceived as a means to an end, which is the creation of a contemplative state of mind.'<sup>258</sup> Equally for Augustine, words are signs which point not to things but to thoughts; they indicate rather than represent. The subordination of words to thoughts is recognisable in the fact that, unless the reality that a word signifies is known, it does not function as a sign of anything beyond itself.<sup>259</sup> Strictly speaking this means that words may only indicate abstractions such as thoughts or intentions.

Truth, in this sense, cannot be exterior but interior, coming from a particular light in the mind, the light of the inner man, who is intrinsically empowered to know the truth because he is created in the image of God, and a part of God's Truth. Connaturally, the Creator is

<sup>256</sup> *Enn.* V. 5, 6. 28 - 34.

<sup>257</sup> *C* 4. 25.

<sup>258</sup> Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) p. 17.

<sup>259</sup> *DMA* 26

omnipresent and inseparable from His creation: though as this cannot be seen in things, it would seem to be limited to God's presence in man, who participates in the word, and in Christ who is the light of humankind.<sup>260</sup> Despite the plethora of discussion across the breadth of Augustine's writing, *City of God* provides what is perhaps the most developed statement on the nature of illumination by Grace, and does so from a transparently humanocentric perspective. The Platonic idea of illumination from the 'soul of the universe' explains, for Augustine, John the Baptist's observation that it is the Light which enlightens every man who comes into the world [John 1. 6-9]. But Augustine makes the distinction that John was not *the* Light, but heralded the true Light.<sup>261</sup> This most developed of Augustine's analysis of interiority reveals a very problematic basis. As critics are aware, in the first instance we might ask, how can words really signify thoughts: surely they are the subject matter and result of thought?<sup>262</sup> But in the second instance Augustine's reading of John the Baptist's words demonstrate a dramatic inconsistency in the idea of interior illumination through the *Logos* in that while the innate reason which all have *may* bring them to the truth by God's grace, Augustine's *logocentrism* only really occurs *Anno Domini* and does not account for John the Baptist's reason, nor any other human's innate ability to reason, as he has defined it. In fact, what Augustine articulates here, is a spiritual as absolute, temporal as contingent distinction; Jesus lives as a man in the world before the crucifixion, though after the resurrection becomes Christ the saviour, existing absolutely, and providing illumination for those with faith. In this way, rather than explaining *how* human reasoning may come to illumination, Augustine uses Plotinus to explain the way in which the human soul may transcend the corporeal world.

What this means is that Augustine's theology is theocentric: it is not just an account of God as in the human soul, but where the creator is in his whole creation. God is present in all things, though Augustine delimits God's presence in the world to the interiority of the human soul where he may be most readily perceived. Augustine's understanding that signs have no inherent meaning or presence in their fallenness, logically progresses to perceive that things must have meaning given to them. Likewise the influence of the *Enneads* would suggest that Augustine is mistaken to think of man's participation in intellect as a result of his imagistic

<sup>260</sup> C 4. 25, DCD X. 2

<sup>261</sup> DCD, X. 2.

<sup>262</sup> Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 53.

similarity to God; as soon as the One is conceptualised or named by the individual the infinite becomes finite, prohibiting the person's attaining unity with the One. In fact the One cannot be said to be any individual thing, as this fixity would limit the launch into the realm of mind, and instantly obstruct the attainment of the One. Rather than tailoring the creator to our measurements the more apposite question is, what was the image that God gave to man? Or: is his image reflected in all things, rather than man alone?

While medieval literature may be hierarchically ordered and comprehensively meaningful, its theological underpinnings are exclusivist, providing a closed matrix of interpretation where understanding is fideistically enclosed. The individual must have faith before he approach knowledge, or it will be meaningless. But this pre-existence of faith implies a pre-existent answer, which would seem to exclude the importance of the animal from Christian thought. Augustine's bestial metaphors, equating the things of the world and a literal understand of them with the ignorant animal attributes of a beast have particularly negative connotations, an unfair imposition of human concerns upon God's animals, and contrary to God's covenants with all living things.<sup>263</sup>

By the time of the *Didascalicon* (c.1120) of Hugh of Saint-Victor (c.1096 - 1141) Augustine's thought on the nature of the sign remains essentially the same, though creation is more explicitly seen to reflect God's purpose:<sup>264</sup> 'the idea in the mind is the internal word, which is shown forth by the sound of the voice ... And the divine wisdom, which the father has uttered out of his heart, invisible in itself, is recognised through creatures and in them.'<sup>265</sup>

<sup>263</sup> God remembers the covenant which is between Himself and man and every living creature of all flesh not to bring further retribution after the flood: '*et recordabor foederis mei vobiscum, et cum omni anima vivente quae carnem vegetat*' (Gen: 9. 15), and promises a covenant with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground to abolish slaughter, bring safety, and betroth them to Him forever: '*Et percutiam cum eis foedus in die illa, cum bestia agri et cum volucre caeli et cum reptili terrae; et arcum et gladium et bellum conteram de terra, et dormire eos faciam fiducialiter*' (Hos. 2. 18).

<sup>264</sup> 'For Hugh, as for Augustine before him, the special power of biblical language lay in its unusual method of signification. In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine had adumbrated a distinction between the two kinds of signs: words, whose very *raison d'être* consists in their function of signifying, and things, which on special occasions can signify something else ...' Minnis and Scott, *op cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>265</sup> Hugh of Saint -Victor, *Didascalicon*, V. iii., trans. by Jerome Taylor in *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide To The Arts* (London: Columbia University Press, 1961) p. 122. Taylor notes the similarity to Augustine's 'We speak flying words which pass away: as soon as your word has sounded in your mouth, it passes ... into silence' [*In Joannis evangelium* XIV. lii. 7 (PL, XXXV, 1506)] p. 219 (n). Augustine is commenting on the arbitrary nature of words as mutable signs of things, and Taylor also cites Augustine in *De Genesi as litteram liber imperfectus* [V. 19 (PL, XXXIV, 227): 'away with the impiety by which we should think that the Word of God, the only-begotten son, is like the word uttered by us. The Word of God neither begins to be nor ceases', Minnis and Scott *ibid.*, p. 219 (n) which draws attention to the need to understand

We must not, Hugh is saying, prefer our own ideas to the divine authors. Likewise Richard of Saint -Victor (d. 1173), a ‘Scottish’ Augustinian, states that ‘[a]ll bodies have a likeness to good things which are invisible.’<sup>266</sup> While Hugh did not always agree with Augustine on other matters, Augustine’s central lines of argument retain their integrity, though they are adapted to new contexts with new ideas.

### 3. 1 (b) Bestiaries and beast fables

How does the thesis that there are ethical questions about the animal which are repressed and occluded in medieval theology, but which are evident in medieval literature, apply to fictive texts? Medieval literature has the freedom and capacity to theorise positions that cannot be conjectured in ‘official’ discourses, the difference between theology and literature being highlighted by graphic fictional representations of the animal, often as metaphors for mankind, and nearly always as epithets of symbolic values. What is clear is that doctrinal issues are often only explored, albeit with reference to an authority such as Augustine, Boethius and Aquinas, in the realm of the imaginary. Each authority provides a different perspective, and it would be too generalising to suggest that there is a single, integral line of thought into which can explain all doctrinal understandings. A text such as Boethius’ (d. 524) *The Consolation of Philosophy*, however, discusses man’s relationship to God philosophically, and develops discussion poetically. It provides an analogue to a particular line of thought which may be affirmed or departed from in subsequent literary texts.

Giving the story of Circe Boethius claims that the vices are more powerful to corrupt the man than the enchantress, as they change the heart instead of simply altering the body. While ‘Circe’s hand was weak’ temptation to vices may corrupt from within:

Those poisons, though, are stranger,  
Which creeping deep within,

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language as a sign which may only ever bear analogous comparison to that which it ultimately signifies. The authority of Augustine’s theory of language provides a basis for the fable form and bears striking similarity to Aquinas’ principle of analogy, discussed below.

<sup>266</sup> Richard of Saint - Victor, *Benjamin Major*, 11, 12, *PL*, 196, col. 90.

Dethrone a man's true self:  
 They do not harm the body,  
 But cruelly wound the mind.<sup>267</sup>

While the bodies of the sailors are corrupted by Circe's power, their minds could not be. However, the potentially degrading effects of vice, while not altering the body, may lower the man to a level where he loses his humanity, and be thus re-defined according to animal types. Philosophy tells Boethius that:

all that exists is in a state of unity and that goodness itself is unity; from which it follows that we must see everything that exists as good. This means that everything which turns away from goodness ceases to exist, and thus that the wicked cease to be what they once were. That they used to be human is shown by the human appearance of their body which still remains. So it was by falling into wickedness that they lost their human nature. Now, since only goodness can raise a man above the level of human kind, it follows that it is proper that wickedness thrusts down to a level below mankind those whom it has dethroned from the condition of being human.

The result is that you cannot think of anyone as human whom you see transformed by wickedness. You could say that someone who robs with violence and burns with greed is like a wolf. A wild and restless man who is for ever exercising his tongue in lawsuits could be compared to a dog yapping. A man whose habit is to lie hidden in an ambush and steal by trapping people would be likened to a fox. A man of quick temper has only to roar to gain the reputation of a lion-heart. The timid coward who is terrified when there is nothing to fear is thought to be like the hind. The man who is lazy, dull and stupid, lives an ass's life. A man of whimsy and fickleness who is ever changing his interests is just like a bird. And a man wallowing in foul and impure lusts is occupied by the filthy pleasures of a sow. So what happens is that when a man abandons goodness and ceases to be human, being unable to rise to a divine condition, he sinks to the level of being an animal.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 4. 3.

<sup>268</sup> *CP*, *ibid.*, 4. 3.



The particular Christian context of this is important. As I will discuss below, Augustine sees that evil has no real existence, rather being a turning from God, and that all that God creates is essentially good. Similarly, in the first of the above paragraphs Boethius deals with the spiritual truths of man's fallenness when he turns from God to become wicked. In the second paragraph, he discusses the way that this should be understood comparatively in the worldly context, through the mirror of the world itself. While a dog or a pig in literal terms are solely animals, this Christian Boethian view extends their significance into the realm of symbolic moral agency, where they almost exclusively represent morally reprehensible traits of mankind. This was pressed into the service of moral didacticism by the medieval church,<sup>269</sup> where animals are compared with men, being seen as signs with taxonomic classifications which reflect human types. Man, just below the angels and just above the animals was provided with these illustrations, warning him of what he would become if, instead of elevating his soul, he submitted to the base desires of the body. Since the Aristotelian perspective that man's inner characteristics are exemplified by his outward physical form was widely known,<sup>270</sup> the animal, 'both by virtue of its position in the Chain of Being and its appearance, served as a most appropriate metaphor for human corruption'<sup>271</sup> and an obvious method, therefore, of Christian debate. Such metaphorisation of man's characteristics are developed differently in poetic texts. Chaucer, for example, often *seems* to hold the popular Boethian perspective, where he might alternatively appeal directly to scripture such as

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<sup>269</sup> Preachers 'should know the natures of animals and also of other things, because there is nothing which moves the hearts of an audience more than the properties of animals and of other things.' Thomas of Chobham's (d.1236) comments on the natural Properties formulates in a helpfully explicit way the idea of the world as a 'universal and publick manuscript.' He states that 'The Lord created different creatures with different natures for [man's] instruction, so that through the ... creature we may contemplate ... what may be useful in the soul ... for there is no creature which may not preach that the God who created it is powerful, and that the God who gave it its order and form is wise, and that the God who conserved it in being is merciful. And speaking in a words sense - there is no creature in which we may not contemplate some property belonging to it which may move us to flee from the Devil, for the whole world is full of different creatures, like a manuscript full of different letters and sentences (or meanings) in which we can read whatever we ought to imitate or flee from.' See D' Avery, D. L., trans., *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 232 and pp. 232 - 233. For a discussion of the 'imaginary' animal serving a symbolic, didactic purposes, mandates and theological beliefs see Pamela Gravestock, 'Did imaginary animals exist?' in Hassig *op cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>270</sup> Direct physiognomic correlations are made between animals and human character traits, and pepper literature and art in this period. The discussions of direct semiotic correspondences which instigate the discourse are to be found in the *Physiognomics* I, 805a 1 - 8, and *Prior Analytics* II, 27. Man as upright animal in *Parts* 658 b 10 - 15, and *Mov* 710 b 10; as animal in genus, in *Parts* 643 a 25; in reproductive correspondence see appendix C, 'The placement and displacement of the feminine in Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*'.

<sup>271</sup> Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Toronto: Kent State University Press, 1971) pp. 20 - 21.

*'iustitia tua quasi montes Domine iudicium tuum abyssus multa homines et iumenta salvos facies Domine'* (Psalm 35:7 in Vulgate cycle, 36.6 in translation). The idea that God brings salvation to man and animal alike is evidently a canonical 'exclusion' from his consciousness, and signifies that his paradigm is one which simply excludes or overlooks scriptural references to animal salvation. This Boethian influence is most evident in a speech of Arcite's in *The Knight's Tale*, which provides a distinction between man and beast and suggests that the beast does not share in the Christian plan of redemption and can follow its animal nature: with no 'soul' there is no punishment *post-mortem*.

And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,  
 That man is bounden to his observaunce,  
 For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,  
 Ther as a beest is deed he hath no peyne;  
 But man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne,  
 Though in this world he have care and wo.<sup>272</sup>

However, elsewhere, in his poem 'Truth' Chaucer departs from this Boethian understanding when he employs the imagery of man as a beast who must leave his stable, suggesting a spiritual distinction between 'beasts' and the human animal: '[f]orth pilgrim, forth! Forth beste, out of thy stal! / Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al.'<sup>273</sup> While animals cannot look upward to God, man's upright posture is a physiological distinguisher between him and the beast – the obvious analogue being Aristotle's *Parts of Animals*.<sup>274</sup> Different from the beast types as catalogued by Boethius, the idea of man as an animal with the agency of reason (*ratio*) provides a quidditative distinction between the beastly animal and the human animal at a moral or tropological level. Man may share attributes with beast-types, but he is also an animal who has choice – including the choice to behave without reason. Ignoring the beast as a literal, didactic sign is to abandon the ability to understand its meaning and to deny the human spirituality which exists above the human carnal body. Cicero, who in *De natura*

<sup>272</sup> KnT 1315 - 1321. References are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson *et al.*, (1987: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>273</sup> 'Truth' (18 – 19) in *The Riverside Chaucer*, *ibid.*, though in other editions such as, for example, *Medieval English Lyrics*, ed. by R. T. Davies (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), this poem is also known as 'Truth shall set you free'.

<sup>274</sup> *Parts* 656 a, 10 - 15.

*deorum* states ‘*Quae primum oes humo excitatos clesus et erectus constituit, ut deorum cognitionem caelum intuentes capere possent*’ [First, [nature] has raised men from the ground to stand tall and upright, so that they might be able to behold the sky, and so gain a knowledge of the gods],<sup>275</sup> argues that when the vicious man becomes a beast, abandoning his reason, he in effect abandons his upright posture which is the symbol and physiological manifestation of his reason. Bartholomaeus Anglicus too states ‘whanne an vnresonable beste is perfitliche ymade ... þe face þerof boweþ toward þe erþe ... and oonliche to mankynde ordeigneþ vpright stature’. Man should ‘seche heven and nout putte his þouþt in þertþe and be obedient to þe wombe as a best’.<sup>276</sup> Individual ‘beasts’ may be ‘obvious’ symbols of human traits, but the boundaries of the broader categorical term ‘animal’ are readily transcendable ones. Man’s genus as an animal, in other words, allows him to be viewed always and primarily as an animal who can transcend the animality of his humanity by aspiring to be like God. Neglecting this duty to his reason, a neglect of the divine within him, is seen to result in the outward expression of his animal nature.

### 3. 2 Animals as perfect sign in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*

In Passus XI and Passus XII of William of Langland’s (c.1330 - 1387) *Piers Plowman* (c.1367) the narrative persona Will is presented with a scene which illustrates for him the relationship of the natural world to the human. That this is an inner dream - a dream within a dream (XI 1 - 5) - provides the best conceivable moral version of world order. Within this inner-dream Will is taken by *kynde*, or Nature, to witness the natural world. In this natural world all creatures except humans act according to Reason. In this context Reason designates the principles of divine law manifest in nature and through the animals of the dream. (XI 319 – 67) Within this Langland uses the animal in two senses; firstly, in the context of an unequivocal criticism of the clergy and secondly, as a worldly sign of divine order and intention. In this second sense he notes the absence of Christian reason yet highlights its

<sup>275</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum*, ed. and trans. by H. Rackham (1933) Heinmann Parallel Texts Series (London: Heinmann Ltd., 1953) II, 56.

<sup>276</sup> *DPR* 3.1. This reference to the ‘wombe’ carries the double meaning of the organ of reproduction which is also the origin of lust and desire, as well as the stomach, in referring to the greed and gluttony associated with animals. See appendix C.

significance as a sign by observing the presence of an innate reason ‘implanted’ in the animal by God. The initial use of the animal as a polemic against clerical corruption reveals discomfort with the consumption of meat when it has been forbidden, though its consumption is justified by pragmatic textual interpretations. Langland’s complex representation and placement of the animal is collocated with a dogmatic and transparently selfish materialism, in which the sensual pleasures of consumption and the misinterpretation of sensory signs are laid open to scrutiny. This highlights the humanocentric disregard, resentment, and misinterpretation of the animal as a connatural expression of God’s will.

The abuse of a community of poor whose poverty should be praised as an ideal Christian state is set against the consumption of the animal as evidence of gluttony and the aspiration to civil estate of spiritual leaders: ‘This lokynge on lewed preestes hath doon me lepe from poverte - / The which I preise, ther pacience is, moore parfit than Richesse.’<sup>277</sup> It had long been a tradition to satirise wealthy clerics by portraying their self – indulgence in order to highlight the oppression of the poor that this caused.<sup>278</sup> Langland’s treatment of this tradition highlights the abuse of clerical possessions and assets where clerics are seen to be sinful because of their excessive wealth, when they should have no title to the ownership of property at all, property ownership being the domain of the civil.<sup>279</sup> This censure is particularised by Langland in the feast with the Great Doctor of Passus XIII where meat-eating is seen as both anti-monistic and anti-monastic, and highlights a friar’s neglect of the poor, his abuse of almsgiving, and his sinful receipt and abuse of bequests:

Ac this maister ne his man no maner flesshe eten,  
 Ac thei eten mete of moore cost – mortrews and potages:  
 Of that men myswonne thei made hem wel at ese.  
 Ac hir sauce was over sour and unsavoury grounde

<sup>277</sup> William of Langland, *Piers Plowman*, the ‘B’ text, ed. by A. V. C. Schmidt, (London: Everyman Classics, 1976), XI, 317 - 318.

<sup>278</sup> For the context see W. Scace, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 30 - 31.

<sup>279</sup> At the issue of ‘The Statute of labourers’ in 1349, Langland would have been in his late teens, and must have had a strong opinion of the document which tried to push back the cost of labour for landowners and employers. Labour had become expensive after the early Thirteen Forties as the Black Death swept across Europe making labour short. This legislation, however, did not prevent the Great Revolt of 1381 against the authority of the Law and the Church. See ‘The Statute of Labourers’ in *Basic Documents in Medieval History*, ed. by N. Downs (London: Princeton University Press, 1959) pp. 171 - 174.

In a morter, *post mortem*, of many bitter peyne –

(XIII, 40 - 45)

The reference to '*post mortem*' is a pun which at the literal sense refers to the meat consumed by clerics, and which is the 'good-eating' of ill-gains. But the secondary meaning plays on the enjoyment of ill-gains by suggesting that it is spoilt by the sauce, the 'bitter peyne' of the prospect of torment after death. Their meat is a sinful feast because its excess and expense deprives the poor of more modest sustenance, but this also amplifies the criticism of clerical greed as consuming the poor themselves: '*vos qui peccata hominem comeditis, nisis pro eis lacrimas et oraciones effunderitis, ea que in deliciis comeditis, in tormentis evometis*'.<sup>280</sup> This criticism of clergy who indulge a gluttony typified by their meat eating habits demonstrates the displacement of concerns about the consumption of flesh by the pursuit of personal indulgence. These underlying concerns are threefold. As the above extracts illustrate, meat eating is seen as an extravagant expenditure of a costly item, which is both paid for by, and deprives the poor of, more modest food. Meat eating is against prescribed rules. But, importantly, it disregards the importance of created beings as aspects and expressions of God's intention and love.

Langland is particularly scathing about the cleric who 'priked a-bout on palfrais ... / An hepe of hounds at his ers, as he a lord were' ('C' vi, 160 - 161). Similarly, Chaucer criticises such aspirations to lordliness, while making a serious point about what classified as meat, parodying the debate in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The monk's eating habits are insinuated by the imagery used to describe his hunting, and his ownership of the property which makes his hunting possible: 'Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable' (GP, 16). He refutes the text that says hunters are unholy, for which he does not give 'a

<sup>280</sup> *Piers* XIII 45a. Schmidt translates these lines as 'You who feast upon men's sins – unless you pour out tears and prayers for them, you will vomit forth in torment what you eat with pleasure.' The *visio* of Piers Plowman begins with the 'fair feeld ful of folk fond I ther bitwene – / Of alle manere of men, the meene and the riche, / Werchyng and wanderyng as the world asketh' (Prologue 17 - 19). Inherent in this symbolism is the implication that at the lowest level of the social strata peasant are treated like animals. Similarly Jean La Bruyere, the French moralist of the seventeenth century, observes human existence at an agricultural level where he explicitly draws the analogy: 'Scattered across the countryside one may observe certain wild animals, male and female, dark, livid and burnt by the sun, attached to the earth which they dig and turn over with invincible stubbornness. However, they have something like an articulated voice and when they stand up they reveal a human face. Indeed, they are human beings ... Thanks to them the other human beings need not sow, labour and harvest in order to live. That is why they ought not to lack the bread which they have sown. Cited by Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 1. 1973 - 74, pp. 3 - 22, p. 6.

pulled hen'. That he is like a fish out of water is a text not worth an 'oyster', his greyhounds are as swift in flight 'as fowel' and 'a fat swan loved he best of any roost'. Indeed, 'He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt' (GP, 177, 182, 190, 206, 200). That we are told he has a preference for 'fat swan' is significant in that it makes a specific reference to the rule of his Benedictine order, while indicating that he takes no pains to observe the rule of that order. Apart from swan it is not explicitly stated what else he eats, though his hunting and its associative imagery suggests that as a monk he is a deeply ironic figure whose aspirations to lordliness and over – consumption indicate his indifference to a specified diet, and signify that his worldly behaviour should be seen in the context of his negligence of a rule which emphasises poverty, chastity and obedience: 'The reule of Seinte Maure or of Seint Beneit – / By cause that it was old and somedel streit / This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace' (GP, 173 - 175) .

The Rule of Saint Benedict (c.530) states: '*Carnium vero quadrupedum omnimodo ab omnibus abstineatur comestio, praeter omnino debiles aegrotos.*'<sup>281</sup> While at first sight the statement seems unequivocal, controversy grew around how to interpret the conditional *Carnium vero quadrupedum*. Four – footed animals must not be consumed, so fish was considered to be acceptable. But subsequently it was thought that fowl might also be acceptable food especially as they had two legs and not four. In addition there were grounds for supposing that fowl may also be classified as fish based on the biblical authority of Genesis 1. 20: '*dixit etiam Deus: producant aquae reptile animæ viventis, et volatile super terram sub firmamento cæli*' [And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that has life, and fowl [that] may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven]. The fact that Benedict himself followed a strict vegetarian diet was evidently not rigidly emulated by the order at any time after his death. Rather, the Benedictines made their best efforts to avoid the dictum, and the subsequent papal Bull '*Benedicta*' of 1336 gave dispensation for the consumption of any meat four times a week<sup>282</sup> though this is in itself spurious given that 'whatever decision St. Benedict makes it has to be observed: - it is

<sup>281</sup> *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, parallel text edition ed. and trans. by J. McCann (London: Burns Oates, 1952) Ch. 39, p. 95. 'Except for the sick who are very weak, let all abstain entirely from the flesh of four-footed animals.'

<sup>282</sup> A definitive and scholarly account is provided by Butler, C., *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Life and Rule*, (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1919) p. 44 ff.

absolute law unless he himself modifies it.<sup>283</sup> In this sense citation of the Rule of St. Benedict controversy presents an example of ecclesiastic debates which were often transparently selfish in their interpretations of monastic Rules, and which are parodied in the Monk's ambivalence toward meat - eating. Though there is no evidence of Chaucer's awareness of Aristotle's comparison of water – fowl to fish the paronomasia he generates would seem to demonstrate a depth of understanding, allowing him to suggest that the ironic figure's worldly indulgences result in the displacement of his soul from its true vocation. Aristotle says that water fowl may be classified as fish being 'web – footed because they live in the water, for their feet being of this kind of service to them in place of fins'.<sup>284</sup> Disrupting such taxonomies, Chaucer observes that a monk heedless of Rules is monstrous because 'likned til a fissh that is waterlees' he is out of his element (GP, 180).

The meat eating debate is not merely a criticism of indulgence in sensual pleasures, but in pleasures that are forbidden by textual authority. Chaucer's monk's joy in worldly consumption disregards so many of Benedict's rules in this way, though most markedly the enjoyment of hunting and eating the animal typifies an indulgence in the things of the world that, as things of God, should demand his respect. Benedict's sacramental vision of the world emphasises the importance of the stewardship, reverence for, and participation in God's act of Creation. Reverence should be given to all things, as God is believed to be manifested in finite things and present in the world. There is no marked division between the sacred and the profane, between the holy and the material. This covers all things from the abstention from meat in chapter thirty – nine of the rule to considering 'all the monastic utensils and goods of the monastery as if they were the sacred vessels.' (RB, 31. 10). Though the monk should honour all men, '*Honorare omnes homines*',<sup>285</sup> this is based on the far less exclusive 'honour all brothers' of 1 Peter 2. 17: '*omnes honorate fraternitatem diligite: Deum time Regem honorificate*' [honour all men, love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king]. The problem is how to interpret what in Benedictine doctrine constitutes *fraternitatem*, in the same way that what constitutes *Carnium vero quadrupedum* is arguable given Benedict's

<sup>283</sup> Chapman. J., *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929) p. 21.

<sup>284</sup> *Parts* 14 a 20.

<sup>285</sup> RB 4. 8. Neither should he become attached to pleasures (RB 4. 12). He should relieve the poor '*pauperes recteare*' (RB 4. 14), prefer nothing to the love of Christ '*Nihili amoris Christi praeponere*' (RB 4. 21) and not be a great eater '*Non multum edacem*' (RB 4. 36). He should certainly not own anything whatever '*neque aliquid habere proprium, nullam omnino rem*' (RB 33).

own vegetarianism and sacramentalism. The Rule, in this sense, is open to wilful misinterpretation. Langland attacks clergy for being culpable of such deliberate egress in that they ‘Glossed the gospel as hem good liked / for coveitise of copes construwed it as thei wolde’ (*prologue* 60) and threatens them with divine retribution ‘as the bible telleth, for breaking of youre rule’ (X, 315). Where the clerical domain should find definition in the terms of the theological virtue *caritas* it is exercised through the worldly and sinful counter-type of Gluttony, and in particular in the consumption of forbidden flesh. In addition a disregard for, or selfish misinterpretation of a textual authority or Rule is not merely the sinful pursuit of sensual pleasure, but ignores the reason for such a statement’s existence.

This context serves on the one hand to highlight the pragmatic misreading of texts and signs, while on the other it satirises clerical corruption and a disrespect for established authority. Selfish desire is seemingly placed over the will of the Creator. From this context we may view Langland’s bestiary, which signifies the presence of God in all things, as well as a discussion about how this should be read, as a criticism of the clerical corruption typified by its disregard for rules which imply a compassionate ethic toward creation.

### 3. 2 (a) Langland’s representation of the animal as Sign

In Passus XI of *Piers Plowman*, Langland’s criticism of the clergy also takes the form of an attack on their ignorance and misinterpretation of language as a sign. As the language of the law may be challenged ‘If fals Latyn be in that lettre’ (XI, 304), so the scribe, who defaces a manuscript, or the cleric who misreads scripture, is a fool who betrays the meaning of a text: ‘*Psallite Deo nostro, psallite; quoniam rex terrae Deus Israel, psallite sapienter*’ (XI, 310, citing Ps. 47. 6 - 7) Juxtaposed with this is a dream *visio* in which Will observes the actions of animals and, though unintentionally, fails to understand their meaning. The dream is an *oraculum* through which Will is guided by the personification of nature, *Kynde*, who presents for his inspection an ordered animal world: ‘fet forth by ensaumples to knowe, / Thorough ech a creature, Kynde my creatour to lovye.’ (XI, 325).



Reson I seigh soothly sewen alle beestes  
 In etynge, in drynkynge and in engendrynge of kynde.  
 And after cours of concepcion noon took kepe of oother  
 As whan thei hadde ryde in rotey tyme; anoonright thereafter  
 Males drowen hem to males amornynge by hemselfe,  
 And [femelles to femelles ferded and drowe].

...

Briddes I biheld that in buskes made nestes;  
 Hadde nevere wye wit to werche the leeste.  
 I hadde wonder at whom and wher the pye  
 Lerned to legge the stikkes in which she leyeth and bredeth.  
 Ther nys wrighte, as I wene, sholde werche hir nest to paye;  
 If any mason made a molde therto, mucche wonder it were.  
 And yet me mervailed moore: many othere briddes  
 Hidden and hileden hir egges ful derne  
 In mareys and moores for men sholde hem noght fynde.

(XI, 335 - 339; XI 344 - 353).

The personification of Reson in this passage, is a facet of God, who follows and informs all non-human animals how correctly to act. Langland employs the rhetorical device of *distributio*, where the specified roles of reason and nature are assigned to personified figures, while the animals and their innate reason or *kynde-wit* serve as *notatio* or character delineation. They describe the character of God's manifestation in the world by the definite signs which are attributed to Him. The animals as signs, in other words, stand as synecdochal tropes that in their order imply the divine will, and that may be described as the principle according to which the world is ordered, apparent in its animal creation.

Within this context Will observes Reason following the animals in their eating, drinking and mating to provide them with the knowledge to live as they do. The act of procreation is singled out as an example of how when mating is concluded the animals separate and 'noon

took kepe of oother' remaining unhindered by sexual desire. 'Males drowen hem to males amornyng by hemselfe, / And [femelles to femelles ferded and drowe]', presenting exemplars who, though mournful to be separated, do not indulge the passion which characterises human physical love.

Will marvels at the craftsmanship of the birds 'that in buskes made nestes' – a skill of which man is incapable. Through Reason's whispered message the beast's actions have an intuitive perfection of action in order, which is withheld from man: 'There nys wrighte, as I wene, should werche hir nest to paye.' The skills of a craftsman cannot compete with what is innately possessed by the birds who act according to God's will which, transmitted through Reason, is *direct* and unmediated by the doubt and desire that accompany man's freewill. What the figure of Nature reveals to Will is the establishment of orderly partition as a theme. The animals represent an ordered universe, whose primal patterning flows from God to be interpreted by man. The clear distinctions are made, and Will's marvelling indicates his delight and approval in confirming each partition of a particular reality conveying God's will. This corresponds closely to the Macrobian doctrine that the universe contained an ordered hierarchy of life which provides a means of access to the mind of God:

*ideo ut summi omnipotentiam dei ostenderet posse vix intelligi, numquam videri, quicquid humano subicitur aspectui templum eius vocavit qui sola mente concipitur ut qui haec veneratur ut templa, cultum tamen maximum debeat conditori.* [In order to show, therefore, that the omnipotence of the supreme God can hardly ever be comprehended and never witnessed, he called whatever is visible to our eyes the temple of that God who is apprehended only in the mind, so that those who worship these visible objects as temples might still owe the greatest reverence to the creator.]<sup>286</sup>

While there is no evidence that Langland would have had direct reference to such thought, Christian Turner has pointed out that Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* is based upon

<sup>286</sup> Macrobius (Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius) *Commentarii In Somnium Scipionis*, ed. by J. Willis, Macrobius Vol.2 Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Lipsiae: In aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1963) 1, 14, p. 55, and in English translation in *Macrobius Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. by Williams Harris Stahl, 53 of the Records of Civilisation, Sources and Studies series (New York: Colombia University Press, 1952) 1, 14, p. 145.

this principle.<sup>287</sup> Accordingly, Langland's animals perform their lives in an ordered perfection - which man may never himself accomplish – because God compensates for the deficiency of rational power in animals through the superiority of their instinctive sense.

The admirable reasonableness and purpose of the animal behaviour he sees leads Will to wonder who is ultimately responsible for them: 'what maister thei hadde, / and who taught hem on trees to tymre so heighe.' (XI, 359 - 360). But the animal's privileged access to Reason also seems unfair to Will whose mood of wonder changes from reverent admiration to anger, as he rebukes Reason for favouring the animal over man:

Ac that moost meved me and my mood chaunged –  
 That Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes  
 Save man and his make: many tyme and ofte  
 No Reson hem folwede, [neither riche ne povere].  
 And thanne I rebuked Reson, and right til hymselfen I seyde,  
 I have wonder of thee, that witty art holden,  
 Why thouw ne sewest man and his make, that no mysfeet hem folwe.'  
 (XI, 368 - 374).

In response Reason tells Will that it is none of his concern. Only in Passus XII is a *Conclusio* to the debate deduced from the necessary consequences of what has been witnessed. Ymaginatif – the personification of imagination – explains that *Kynde* (nature, though glossed in this context by Schmidt as 'God') is responsible for the arrangements of the natural world:

And so I seye by thee, that sekest after the whyes,  
 And aresonedest Reson, a rebukyng as it were,  
 And willest of briddes and of beestes and of hir bredyng knowe,  
 Why some be alough and some aloft, thi likyng it were;

<sup>287</sup> The most recent appraisal of the influence of Neoplatonic thought on the later part of the period is Christian Turner's, "The Reception of Plato and Neoplatonism in Late Medieval English Literature," unpublished D.Phil thesis (University of York, 1998) p. 7ff.

And of the floures in the fryth and of hire faire hewes –  
 Wherof thei cacche hir colours so clere and so brighte,  
 And of the stones and of the sterres – thow studieth, as I leve,  
 How evere beest outhir brid hath so breme wittes ...  
 ‘Clergie ne Kynde Wit ne knew nevere the cause,  
 Ac Kynde Knoweth the cause hymself and no creature ellis.  
 He is the pies patron and putteth it in hir ere  
 That the thorn is thikkest to buylden and brede.

(XII, 217 - 228).

Will cannot clearly see what is signified and wants a more thorough knowledge from Reason. Ymaginatif is ‘imagination’ most literally, but is also the faculty of forming mental images of things in the exterior world:

Imaginative thus makes it possible for the mind to work since it cannot act on the data given by experience and the senses directly but must interiorise them before it can do so. Medieval psychology did not generally associate this faculty with the creation of art, but rather with memory and with the power of the mind to make analogies and abstractions for use in reasoning.<sup>288</sup>

Understanding must come from the internalising of experience. As Ymaginatif points out, as clerks who use reason though find no answers by their intelligence, Will ‘sekest after the whyes’ which is *not* equivalent to the *sapientia* of Psalm forty six as has been cited in Passus XI. The love of knowledge for its own sake is the selfish pursuit of knowledge over the pursuit of love of God. Equally, *sapiential* knowledge of God is not fully available to any creature by intelligence and learning alone, a point made by Ymaginatif: ‘*Quare placuit? Quia voluit*’ (XI, 216a). White’s explanation that ‘It makes perfect sense that thorough knowledge of all things in a created being should be deemed against the natural order, involving as it does the usurpation of the creator’s omniscience by the creature’<sup>289</sup> provides a clarification of why intellect and learning alone are inaccessible, but does not explain how

<sup>288</sup> Talbot Donaldson, E., *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation*, ed. by E. D. Kirk and J. H. Anderson (London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1990) p. 253.

<sup>289</sup> White, H., *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988) p. 47.

this understanding comes about. Christian Turner's account of the reception of Neoplatonism, especially through Augustine and Boethius, illustrates a particular line of thought:

Following Plato's theory, Boethius divided the life of the mind between two orders of object, *intellectibilia* (intellectible objects, including only the accessible divinity) and *intelligibilia* (intelligible objects, including all of the sense – created world), which correspond to two types of knowledge; *intellecta* and *ratio*. However, this distinction contains two contradictory impulses which create a tension at the heart of Neoplatonisms. The first is that sense – perceptible and intelligible worlds are opposed, and therefore that any ascent to the divinity is fraught with difficulty. This 'divisive' impulse devalues the world of the flesh in favour of the spirit, represents a dualistic world view and maintains that there is a gulf between the human and the divine, which for Augustine could only be surmounted by grace. In contrast, a second Neoplatonic impulse ... asserts the opposite, that the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm, and that the World Soul might act as an intermediary between *intellectibilia* and *intelligibilia*. This 'aspirant' impulse emphasises the notion of unity and hierarchy, and presents the corporeal world as an allegorical medium which can express the spiritual world. Such unity of the two worlds opposed Augustinian notions of Grace, and threatened to reduce tenets of Christian soteriology into an inevitable emanation followed by the return of the divinity. Therefore 'aspirant' Neoplatonic doctrines of harmony which presented the cosmos as unified by a Great Chain stood in contrast to the 'divisive' Neoplatonic doctrines which asserted that the earthly mundanity of the body resisted transcendence.<sup>290</sup>

Augustine's Neoplatonic understanding of the corporeal as that which 'could only be surmounted by grace' stands in contrast with a second Neoplatonic idea, namely that the microcosm / macrocosm correspondence is one in which all things may be reconciled in unity, and within which the things of the world stand as an allegorical presentation of the spiritual. Augustine's 'divisive' Neoplatonic doctrine (though not Gnostic in the Christian sense) of a fallen world where illumination is attainable by grace alone, is also one in which

<sup>290</sup> Turner, *op cit.*, pp. 23 - 24.

salvation is imminent in and by this world. Turner's observation that Humankind stands at a paradoxical borderline between these corporeal and non – corporeal impulses, is one allowing us to see man either as dragged down by matter or as given the possibility of participating in divine reality by soul. While there is no evidence that Langland has any of these ideas directly in mind, what is apparent is that *intellecta* and *ratio* are found to be insufficient alone as a means to salvation; the gulf between man and God is not merely a division of two worlds, but a division of understanding. Though essentially a platonic idea this gulf, in Augustine's Christianised paradigm, may be bridged by the interior faith of the individual to bring an understanding of the world around him.<sup>291</sup>

The dream provides a selection of animals who stand as moral exemplars of what man's behaviour *should* be. This is innate to them. Where reason has been a *faculty* at its first definition, 'For rightfully Reson sholde rule yow alle, / And Kynde Wit be wardeyn youre welthe to kepe' (I, 54 - 55), at Passus XI it is a natural principle. When Reason fails to *sewe* man, 'No Reson hem folwede' (XI, 371). Animals behave unquestioningly according to the *principle* of reason, while men who possess the faculty of reason and its power of moral choice often neglect the principle itself. Rather, through the contemplation of external reality the perceiver should turn to his faith in God for knowledge of the Truth. Where knowledge of books is natural to scholars the nature of clerks is constituted by their involvement in those books – a potential block to the Truth. Piers' journey to Truth ended at Passus IV with the realisation that Truth dwells in the heart. But in Passus XII it is particularly appropriate that a poor plowman should be told by Ymaginatif that he should reflect on the natural signs available to him, and then look to himself for the Truth of their meaning. As for Augustine, the earthbound moral enterprise of those living without the Christian revelation is essentially worthless without salvation. Contemplation of the beast, unilluminated by divine revelation, will not alone bring salvation.

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<sup>291</sup> Charles Freeman traces this thought back to Paul, who sees the concept of 'rational argument' typifying the Greek intellectual achievement itself, being superseded by the coming of Christ: 'The more they [non-Christians] called themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew ... they made nonsense out of logic wand their empty minds were darkened' (Rom. 1. 21-2) to the Corinthians (11. 25) he writes 'the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God' there is something of the mystic in Paul's disregard of logic (and a paradox in the way he uses his considerable rhetorical skills to attack the very intellectual tradition of which rhetoric was part). This regard had unfortunate consequences. As Paul's writings came to be seen as authoritative it became a mark of the committed Christian to be able to reject rational thought, and even the evidence of empirical experience.' Freeman *op cit.*, p. 119.

### 3. 2 (b) Bartholomaeus Anglicus and influence of the literal sense

Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* contains a passage of striking literal similarity to that in which Will observes the actions of animals, and the understanding of the potential significance of the animal which is consistent in both texts suggests the possibility that Bartholomaeus provides an analogue, or at least a shared understanding of theological values.<sup>292</sup> The first chapter of Bartholomaeus' *De animalibus* is an introductory chapter in which, by reference to Aristotle, animals are described 'in general' or by their universal characteristics.

And oonlyche man hap mynde of þat was for3ete, as Auicenne seith. But many bestes holdeþ in mynde þinges þat he seep and lerneþ, as Aristotle seiþ *libro i*. And oonliche in man *is* mynde, as mynde is obedient to resoun. Þerfore *libro xi. de ciuitate dei* Austyn seiþ þat *in vnreasonable bestes is wonder redynesse of witte but in hem is no science, propurliche to speken of science. But in hem likenesse of science is yfounded, for þey haueþ redynesse of witte in bredynge and of rerynge of hire brood and in buldynge and makynge of dowweres and dennes, in sechyng and getynge of mete and of nourisshynge, in medicyne and helynge of woundes ... in knowynge of loue of hire makes. ...* Also Aristotle seiþ þat in euery beste is a radical membre þat is welle and heed of alle þe vertues natural and spiritual and of fielynge. ... As Auicenne seiþ, of þe roote of þe herte bygynneþ creacioun, makynge, and scape of alle bestes. Whanne an vnreasonable beste is parfitliche ymade and yschape þe face þerof boweþ toward þe erþe þat is þe original and material matiere wherof it com. And oonliche to man kynde ordeigneþ and eseþ vpright stature; *in* þat mankynde is wonderliche ymade noble and passynge alle

<sup>292</sup> In *On Abstinence* Porphyry makes comparison between man and animal, though he sees the bad qualities in men, which prohibit them from performing properly as being far worse than those in the animal. In striking similarity to Augustine, Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Langland, Porphyry describes the way that animals build nests, have natural sagacity and prudence, and know where and how to mate in exemplary fashion. He sees this as a clear rational which, because man cannot do what they can do nor understand how they do it, does not mean that divinity is not present in them (*Abst.* 3. 11).

opre bestes, as þe poete [Aristotle] seiþ þat kynde haþ 3iue to man an high moup  
and vertu to loken on heuene.

(DPR 18. 1, my emphasis).

The description of the animals having ‘redynesse of witte in bredynge’, rearing and nest – building, together with the observation that they have some innate knowledge or ‘likenesse of science’, is cognate with Langland’s description of the *kynde -wit* of animals. Equally here, Bartholomaeus states that only in man is the mind obedient to reason, though other beasts have the appearance of a memory which is a different kind of reasoning activity.

Bartholomaeus’ literal exposition has as its authority Augustine who, we are told, says that animals are quick of wit, though have no understanding of that wit. His statement that animals have ‘redynesse of witte’ or innate knowledge accords, both conceptually and literally, with Langland’s negotiation of the same subject matter which, in common with Aquinas’ understanding, perceives the prudence of animals as intrinsic: ‘*Dicendum quod omnia animalia habent quandam participationem prudentie et rationis secundum aestimationem naturalem*’ [all animals by their natural instinct have a certain participation in prudence and reason].<sup>293</sup> If Langland does indeed owe a debt to Bartholomaeus then it might be Bartholomaeus’ reference to Augustine that allows the retrieval of a fuller meaning of the context in which both writers are thinking of the animal.

Bartholomaeus refers to book eleven of *City of God*, and in chapter twenty seven of that book Augustine discusses the design of the animal as a sign of God’s purpose, but takes the opportunity to combine his observations on the animal with a summation of how he understands the function of the animal as a sign:

Why, even the irrational animals, from the immense dragons down to the tiniest worms, who are not endowed with the capacity to think on those matters, show that they wish to exist and to avoid extinction. They show this by taking every possible action to escape destruction. ... Some other creatures may have much sharper vision than we have for seeing in the light of the sun; but they cannot attain to that immaterial light which casts as it were its rays upon our minds, to enable us to come

<sup>293</sup> ST part 1, Q 96, art. 1, ad. 4.



to a right judgement about all these other creatures. For this we can do, in proportion as we receive this light. Nevertheless, although there is no kind of real knowledge in the sense of irrational creatures, there is at least something parallel to knowledge.

Yet these and all other material things have their causes hidden in nature; but they offer their forms to the perception of our senses, those forms which give loveliness to the structure of this visible world. It almost seems as if they long to be known, just because they cannot know themselves. We apprehend them by our bodily senses, but it is not by our bodily senses that we form a judgement on them. For we have another sense, far more important than the bodily sense, the sense of the inner man, by which we apprehend what is just and what is unjust, the just by means of the 'idea' which is presented to the intellect, the unjust by the absence of it.<sup>294</sup>

For Augustine the design of all creatures includes an in-built will to live which leads them instinctively to avoid annihilation. Indeed this is a fundamentally Platonic idea: in *On Abstinence* Porphyry refers to Aristotle's *De anima*. Elsewhere Aristotle states that 'some of the animals whose blood is watery have a specially subtle intelligence ... a more mobile faculty of sensation. This is why, as I said before, some of the bloodless creatures have a more intelligent soul than some of the blooded ones.'<sup>295</sup> The will to exist and the logic by which annihilation is avoided is not a self-conscious one. Rather, this will is the will of the creator which is inherent within them. Seemingly, the idea that the animal is an index to God's intention contradicts Augustine's assertions that it is the interior world alone which allows a true perception of the real meaning (*res ipsa*) of intelligible things such as animals.<sup>296</sup> But he is careful here to qualify the idea that the form and design observed in the

<sup>294</sup> Augustine, *DCD*, *op cit.*, XI, 27, *cf.*, the Platonic understanding of the innate knowledge in man being brought out to be conscious of itself as expressed by Boethius: 'We are not dealing with willed motions of the conscious mind, but with instinctive motions, like the way we digest the food we have taken without thinking about it, and the way we breathe in our sleep without being conscious of it. Not even in living things is the love of self-preservation due to the wishes of their mind, but to the principles of their nature. For often when there are reasons which force death upon a creature, Nature turns away in horror, but the will accepts it. And on the other hand, the work of procreation which alone gives mortal creatures their continuity and which Nature always desires, is sometimes curbed by the will. To such an extent does this love of self-preservation stem not from conscious desire, but from natural instinct. Providence has given its creatures one great reason to go on living, namely that instinctive desire for the greatest possible self – preservation' *CP* III. XI.

<sup>295</sup> Aristotle, *Parts* 650 b 20 – 25. Porphyry's *Abst.*, 3. 8., citing *De anima* 3. 427 b 14 ff., *cf.*,

<sup>296</sup> In *Confessions* Augustine observes: 'For surely the things themselves are not let into the memory, but the images of them only are with an admirable swiftness caught in, and in most wonderful cabinets stored up; whence they are most wonderfully fetched out again by the act of remembering.' ... 'I have perceived with all

animal's avoidance of annihilation is itself significant, by explaining that that significance is contingent upon man's capacity to understand it through the divine Light. The animal cannot know its own meaning. But stating the importance of the interiority of divine illumination to man, Augustine observes that on the one hand animals, though literally having the ocular capacity to see like - if not better than - man, cannot see ontologically, having no logic and awareness of themselves. In contrast man may see ontologically and understand the significance of animals which have no knowledge of themselves. Man may do this through 'that immaterial light' which enables him to come to a 'right judgement about all these other creatures.' In reflecting God's intention in their design they provide the Sign upon which man in turn reflects and may ultimately perceive the meaning of, though only by inward turns to the 'inner man' and faith where, by reflection on the 'idea,' illumination will be found.

In Bartholomaeus' 'literal sense' description animals have intrinsic reason and innate intelligence. For Augustine, the significance of this innate intelligence is contingent upon the way we understand them. In Langland's fictional version, we are encouraged to see God's presence in his creation, but advised that we may indeed only understand what that presence means if we have the faith which would allow His presence and purpose to be revealed. Just as Ymaginatif explains that Learning and intelligence alone are insufficient to perceive the reason why the animals behave as they do, 'Clergie ne Kynde Wit ne knew nevere the cause, Ac Kynde [God] Knoweth the cause hymself and no creature ellis,' so interior faith may provide the perceiver with understanding. That animals have something which makes them perfect at what they do – breeding, rearing, and building their homes – is frustrating for Will because though he glimpses the moral significance of Nature's harmony his spontaneous attempt to understand *why* man is excluded from this harmony affords no immediate answer. Theologically Augustine, and figuratively Ymaginatif, point to God's significant presence in animals – though what this means may only be understood quiditatively at an ontological level. For an answer Will should look to his inner faith, and rather than questioning the purpose of *kynde – wit*, understand it as God's presence and will.

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the senses of my body those numbers which we name in counting; but those numbers by which we count, are far different, not only are they the images of these, and therefore they have a real existence' (C 10.9 - 10.12).

### 3. 2 (c) Langland's Theocentric view of the animal

The failure of scripture to yield an immediate answer to Will's questions results in expressions of doctrinal thought about the difference between knowledge and understanding, and defers the problem to representations of the animal which illustrate what that problem is. This demonstrates a pre-emptive recognition that language alone is unable adequately to represent the transcendent.

In *Piers Plowman* what is shown to Will is an essentially theocentric view of creation in which humans should have a God - centred view of nature which does not overemphasise the singular or humanocentric importance of man's will. God, as self-existent omnipotent who brings into being the worldly reality, does not *need* a creation whose foundation is quite literally nothing other than His will. Rather, nature continues to exist as an expression of His love: 'The created order is dependent upon God not only for its creation but for its continued existence. Everything that exists therefore does so in a relationship with the creator to which it belongs.'<sup>297</sup> As with Porphyry's understanding of the animal in *On Abstinence*, animals are seen discursively to perceive the manner in which they are inwardly affected, while it cannot be vocally enunciated to or by them. For Porphyry there is a silent discourse which takes place in the soul. The human law of speech offers a language which is incapable of effectively representing such a transcendent communion between the animal and its maker. Animals act conformably to the laws which they receive from the gods and nature (*ABST.* 3. 2). This is a good enough reason for Porphyry not to consume the animal, though similarly Aquinas' sees the essential goodness of creation, based on the creation of beasts and birds in Genesis 2. 19<sup>298</sup> in terms of the value of each kind of creature in itself, signified by God's leading the animals to man so that he would give them names expressive of their respective natures: '*Quod*

<sup>297</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, (London: SMC Press Ltd., 1994) pp. 96 - 97.

<sup>298</sup> '*formatis igitur, Dominus Deus, de humo cunctis animantibus terræ et universis volatilibus cæli, adduxit ea ad Adam, ut videret quid vocaret ea omne enim quod vocavit Adam animæ viventis, ipsum est nomen ejus*' (Gen. 2.19).

*significatum est per hoc quod Deus ad eum animalia adduxit, ut eis nomina imponeret, quae eorum naturas designant.*<sup>299</sup> Creation is essentially good (Gen 1.21), but it is a utility for man. With the exception of man, who is created in God's image, it is created according to types (Gen. 1.25). When man does go against God's will he irretrievably separates himself from his union with nature and acquires the knowledge of the good and evil which will require his salvation, and which changes his understanding and perspective of God's good world.

Divinely, the crucial question is how far such scholastic theories may properly be described as theocentric. Ultimately, of course they are. A God of all beings is, by definition, the centre of the universe, which, anagogically, has no existence outside his essence. This constitutes the most ineluctable difference between Christian theory and non - Christian theories. In any comparative consideration 'theocentricity' in that sense stands on the distinctive side of the equations.

Thus, the question of how Will should come 'Thorough ech creature, Kynde my creatour to love' is answered in two ways. The first, at the conclusion of Passus XI, is that 'wit and wisdom ... was som tyme tresor / To kepe with a commune – no catel was holde better - / And mucche murthe and manhod' (XI, 293 - 295). In broad correspondence with Augustine's doctrine of sign and salvation we are told that intelligence will allow some understanding, but will not alone assist the attainment of salvation. The second answer is implicit within the assertion that while intelligence and wisdom allow Will to see the significant harmony of the animals as moral exemplars, ontological meaning is indicated by a creation which God occupies. When Etienne Gilson states that 'Faith, properly speaking, is in the human intellect, but must in a way reside also in things, albeit in things as related to the divine intellect',<sup>300</sup> he draws attention to this presence. Schmidt's glossing of *kynde* as 'God' (XII 226) highlights that *Kynde* is a synecdoche device, a part of a whole from which He is inseparable, irreducible and for which no dichotomy will suffice. While it may have significance for man creation exists not for him, but for God - a simple fundamental Christian truth that is obscure to Will. Even if human animals are the ultimate aspect of a

<sup>299</sup> *ST* part 1, Q 96, art. 1, ad 3.

<sup>300</sup> Gilson, *op cit.*, p. 238.

material Creation it does not follow that everything was made for man. In the figures of Reson and Kynde God can be seen to be ‘for’ *all* creation, caring for them and loving them as He does. When Will asks why the birds and beasts have such sagacity, the response is that it is because it is God’s will, the cause only known by God himself: ‘Clergie ne Kynde Wit ne knew nevere the cause, / Ac Kynde Knoweth the cause hymself and no creature ellis’.

It is God’s will because He has paid the greatest cost for creation in the Incarnation and Sacrifice, principal in the plan of redemption in which all things are created in Christ and saved in him: ‘*qui eripuit nos de potestate tenebrarum et transtulit in regnum Filii dilectionis suae*’ [Col. 1. 13]. In this way God has emptied himself into creation and is pre-eminent in that creation: ‘who suffereth more than God’ quod he [Reason]; ‘no gome, as I leeve. / He myghte amende in a minute while al that mysstandeth, / Ac he suffreth for som mannes goode, and so it is oure better.’ (XI 379 – 382). Thus, Reason explains that God could imminently put right all wrong but continues to suffer and tolerate evil in the world for the benefit of particular individuals, and that God so loves the world that He gave his only begotten son: ‘*sic enim Deus dilixit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret*’ (John 3. 16). Divinely, the Christ principle here is one of transparency, in which the dream within a dream affords will with a momentary ability to see through things to God, as He is contained within all things. Creation is not fallen, merely man’s perspective of it, and in a fleeting moment Will is privileged to see it as it really is. Our human reason, and the contingencies of free – will, perverts a clear perspective of the truth, and from seeing it in all its glory. Thus we cannot, either, use words to describe God’s creation.

What Will’s *oraculum* does is to actualise creation. Animals would merely be instrumental to man if man’s pleasure alone was God’s main concern. In *Piers Plowman* every creature is blessed with a function and significance or it is no creature at all: to posit that the creator can be indifferent to creatures, especially those who are indwelt by the spirit, is ultimately to posit a God indifferent to his or her own nature and being. In this way, Christian theology in *Piers Plowman* is not found merely in the ascent of man to God but in the ‘revelation of God in his self-emptying in the crucified Christ which opens up God’s sphere of life to the

development of man in him.<sup>301</sup> It is the special task of man within creation to do with his reason what other animals cannot: ‘honour, respect and rejoice in the creation in which God rejoices’<sup>302</sup> and in the differentiated creatures fulfilled by Himself.

Augustine’s understanding of nature in *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (*On the Catholic and the Manichean Way of Life*) is also essentially theocentric, though he sees this in terms of absolutes and contingency. All things other than God are mutable. *Natura*, for him, straightforwardly means anything that exists: *Natura nihil est aliud, quam id quod intelligitur ... aliquid esse* [a nature is nothing but that thing which is recognised as something]<sup>303</sup> and everything that is a ‘“nature” viz., a really existing thing.’<sup>304</sup> Only one existing being has an immutable *natura*. As with the Neoplatonic understanding of the One (*Nous*) we should understand God in the terms of ‘*Illa natura [sic., Dei] quae facta non est ... ob hoc immutabilis sola est*’ [That nature – namely, God – which is not made is on that account the only immutable one].<sup>305</sup> Self-existent and eternal, God is *Natura* with an unchanging essence. All other natures are mutable because they are made by Him from the nothingness on which they are founded: ‘*Omnia quae fecit, quex nihilo fecit, mutabilia sunt*’ [all things that He made are mutable being made from nothing].<sup>306</sup>

While animals work and abide in creation, man’s reason takes him outside essential needs, to his wants, and so like Will he tries to read and correct creation from his point of view: a solely humanocentric concern which comes from free choice, placing him outside of a structure where God’s will is inherent. The will of an individual is immaterial and misguided, while God’s will is expressed through His animals, who always abide by His will. Thus, the animal becomes, in this context, exemplary.

<sup>301</sup> Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press 1974) p. 275.

<sup>302</sup> Linzey, 1994, *op cit.*, 25.

<sup>303</sup> Augustine, *On the Manichean Way of Life* 2.2, *PL*, 32: 1346.

<sup>304</sup> James F. Anderson, *Saint Augustine and Being: A Metaphysical Essay* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965) p. 22.

<sup>305</sup> Augustine, *Incomplete Work Against Julian*, 5. 44: *PL*, 45. 1494 - 95, 1508 - 9, cited in English translation by Anderson, *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>306</sup> Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, *PL*, 42: 551, glossing Gen. 1. 1 ‘*in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram*’ and Col. 1. 17 ‘*et ipse est ante omnes et omnia in ipso constant*’ before which there is literally and theologically nothing but Himself.

Augustine's position seems paradoxical in that he is saying that God is present in the world, yet also saying that the world has no inherent meaning. Inconsistently, he propounds a theocentric attitude to creation, but also says that it cannot be read because it is fallen. To see the paradox in terms of absolute and contingent structures of understanding may be seen to resolve this apparent paradox. Derrida, explaining such structures, states that:

... reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the *logos*. Even when the thing, the "referent", is not immediately related to the *logos* in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing. When it seems to go otherwise, it is because a metaphoric mediation has insinuated itself into the relationship and has simulated immediacy; the writing of truth in the soul, opposed by Phaedrus (278a) to bad writing (writing in the "literal" [*propre*] and ordinary sense, "sensible" writing, "in space"), the book of nature and God's writing, especially in the Middle Ages; all that functions as *metaphor* in these discourses confirms the privilege of the *logos* and founds the "literal" meaning then given to writing: a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an external verity, eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present *logos*. The paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named by metaphor.<sup>307</sup>

Derrida explains that meaning is always secondary to the *logos* even if the referent, in this case the animal, has no immediate relation to the *logos*. Meaning may be generated by textual representations, which as metaphors may make meaning more immediate. This privileges the *logos*, which may then see through signs to their meaning; the imminence of real meaning in the *logos*, in other words, is dependent upon material, metaphorical, contingent signs, which may only be represented and identifiable in a *system* of signs expressing God's intentions – or nature as a comprehensively meaningful book. How this structure may be interpreted is perspectival and dependent upon the position of the

<sup>307</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967) Corrected Edition trans. by G. C. Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) pp. 14 - 15.

individual. In this way, for Augustine an absolute point of view is inexpressible through material things, though they indicate anagogic absolutes.

### 3. 3 'Be figure of ane vther thing': Robert Henryson and the animal as *figure*

Despite the hardening of attitudes towards animals in the early scholastic period, the borders and peripheries between the human and animal can be seen to be in constant discourse with one another. In the fictive text this discourse produces powerful symbolic repertoires where the human - animal dichotomy can be seen to be dynamically unstable. There can be no better example of this symbolic, poetic discourse than the *Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian* of Robert Henryson where both correspondences and disjunctions between the animal and man provide a plethora of examples of the way in which a straight-forward categorisation or dismissal of the animal becomes problematic and threatens any unified integrity between tale and *moralitas*. There is nothing new in the assertion that Henryson disrupts expectation between the two, though in addition I will illustrate here that it is the animal which provides the discursive site which disrupts generic expectations.

What I do *not* intend to do here is examine either the origins of the fable form or the breadth and diversity of its use and popularity. Rather, I will examine the fables as the most distinct use of the animal in fictions of this period from the premise that the occurrence of the animal in fiction questions its own displacement from ethical inclusion and consideration in Christian thought. In drawing the comparison between beasts and a mankind whose souls are embodied in an animal body, fable animals provide an apposite vehicle for the exploration of man's sinful or 'animal' tendencies. Highlighting the similarity between men and animals, Henryson's *Fables* express the man / animal inter-changeability by using animal types, or 'typis figurall'<sup>308</sup> as metaphorical figures of types of men, and allows the irrational to become rational in order to illustrate the various sins mankind falls prey to when he forgets his reason and follows his instinct and habit to become like a beast. In this way the animal

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<sup>308</sup> Robert Henryson, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. by Denton Fox, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 589. I take Fox's edition and its ordering as authoritative throughout.



provides an obvious vehicle for Christian debate – especially evident in those instances where Henryson draws direct attention to the similarity between the two. In the first instance I will look at the way Henryson deals with the ‘lying’ charge in which he defends his poetic use of animals. In the Didascalie tradition, didactic fiction persuades by drawing on nature and animals as a taxonomic sign of how man should or should not behave, in order to lead him to live a better Christian life. Within this didactic mode Henryson’s defence of poetry in the ‘Prolog’ to *The Fables* provides an example of the way the poetic may deal explicitly with ethical questions about the animal and the bestial aspects of man, which the official discourses of theology and philosophy that underpin the fiction do *not*. Expressed poetically these questions are evident in the imagined reality of a fictive animal world, offering a tremendous hermeneutic flexibility inseparable from Henryson’s use of the animal as metaphor in a fictional context. Correspondingly I will look at Henryson’s use of ‘figure’, and in particular at the ‘syllogism’ to which he refers to ask whether the logic which the animals ‘dispute’ stands up alone, or is dependent upon it being animals who use it.

### 3. 3 (a) The rhetoric of fiction

The ‘Prolog’ to *The Fables* delineates Henryson’s art as one involving construction, combination and argument in a fictive context – in fact the art of the *makar*.<sup>309</sup> Within this it emphasises the importance of the guidance of a critical criterion which must be observed in order to follow the author’s intentions. Pleasure will be gained from the artist’s work but the reader or listener must exercise effort to gain a fuller understanding of fables which defamiliarise their message by illustrating and allegorising their lessons through the ‘central figure of the cycle – man as animal’.<sup>310</sup>

This combination of the man and the beast emphasises the concept that each human is composed of a rational soul in a carnal body, and indicates the didactic nature of the fables in

<sup>309</sup> The creator or poet. Henryson and the Scottish poets Douglas and Dunbar were seen as skilled craftsmen who construct intricate poetic structures with words. Thus the reference to them as *Makars* is a similitude which draws on a building construction analogy.

<sup>310</sup> Jamieson, I. W. A., *The Poetry of Robert Henryson; A Study of the use of Source Material*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh: 1964) pp. 38 – 40.

seeking to educate Christians that from this inner dichotomy they should prioritise the needs of the soul above the physical desires of the body. Over and above this general teaching aim specific morals and spiritual truths are encouraged to be found - not merely at the literal level of each fable, but in its figurative meaning:

Thocht Fein3eit fabils of ald poetre  
 Be not al grundid vpon truth, 3it than,  
 Thair polite termes of sweit rhetore  
 Richt plesand ar vnto the eir of man;  
 And als the caus quhy thay first began  
 Wes to repreif the of thi misleuing,  
 O man, be figure of ane vther thing.

(Prologue, 1 - 7).

Henryson instructs that the moral purpose of the allegory will be as a rebuke to the reader's life style. But the immediate claim that the fable animals will stand in as, or be metaphors for man 'be figure of ane vther thing' to highlight man's animality seems to complicate the overall intention that man should repress or at least move away from his animal nature whose digressive tendencies can result in him behaving 'lyke ane beist / Quilk lufis ay carnall and foull delyte' (Prologue, 50 - 51).

Though merely fictional, rhetorical and figurative, the alternative world of the fables is a space preoccupied by the animal. Theologically, as in Henryson's fictive world, mankind is already digressive; but in *The Fabillis* mankind's animal nature is assumed and prefigured by types of animal who represent human traits and characteristics emphasising and illustrating that over which he should exercise dominion. But taking man back to the realm of the animal is also an ironic move on Henryson's part, creating ambiguity about the relationship between, and borders of, man and animal. While Henryson's poetic treatment of theological problems concerning man's similarity to the animal leaves him open to the charge that fables are a lie which intentionally disrupt or distort an understanding of 'truth', it is also the case that where the animal is not examined in any detailed or practical context by 'official' discourses, it is explored more fully in the poetic. Consequently, by observing at the outset

that 'Brutal beistis spak and vnderstude' (Prologue, 44) in the fables, Henryson emphasises the ironic disturbance between a person or thing and their sign which is always inclined to generate ambiguity, play and paradox. Subsequently he must have been acutely aware that the metaphor of 'aping', especially given that his intention is to deal with speaking animals, must prompt an immediate defensive stroke to counter the charge of being a liar.<sup>311</sup> R. D. S. Jack describes the problem thus:

The fact that animals do not normally conduct conversations highlights the sensitive question of whether imaginative art should be dismissed as lying. In a brief but thorough defence Henryson moves from the text to author to audience. He opens his case (st. 1) by squarely facing the 'lying' charge. Imagined particulars may represent truthful concepts and so draw us to a better life (sts. 2 - 3).<sup>312</sup>

The verbal persuasion of the fables, in other words, converts an argument which transforms fiction, or a 'lie', into the perfect vehicle for the poet's persuasive, didactic craft. Its defamiliarisation through the allegory of the fable allows an understanding of the animal as a figure or metaphor which, though bearing little relation to the 'real' at the literal level, transmits truths about animalness over and above a mere literal sense 'scientific' taxonomy and physiognomy.

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<sup>311</sup> According to E. R. Curtius the 'aping' topos can be used against an intelligent imitator of another's thoughts, actions, or work. By effecting the modesty or deferment topos the poet may leave himself open to the accusation that he acts habitually, unthinkingly and in an ape – like manner by copying another writer. Curtius states:

The metaphorical use of *simia* is frequent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. ... *simia* can be applied not only to persons but also to abstractions and artefacts which assume the appearance of being something they are not. The real ape (*simius*) becomes the *simia* when he imitates man, (*simius humanae naturae simia*), as an example of which the elder Pliny had adduced the fondness of apes playing draughts. An intelligent imitator could thus be called *simia*. (Curtius, *op cit.*, pp. 538-539)

In response to this position Boccaccio employs an inversion on the same theme: 'these fine cattle bellow still further to the effect that poets are tale-mongers, or, to use the lower and more hateful term which they sometimes employ in their resentment – liars.' Boccaccio, *The Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, XIV, chapter x: 'It is rather Useful rather than Damnable to compose stories' (*fabulae*), trans. by Charles, G. Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's De genealogia deorum*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1930) p. 67. Animal types are used as an insult by comparing them to human counterparts who share designated attributes; the animal is manipulated to speak a chosen message with which they might be associated in the same way that the misuse of reason may become an animal act: 'irrational animals are not masters of their own actions, for they do not act but are acted upon' ST 1. 11a, Q 6, art 2.

<sup>312</sup> R. D. S. Jack and P. A. T. Rozendaal, eds., *The Mercat Anthology of Early Scottish Literature 1375 – 1707* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press 1997) p. 280.

An overview of the history of the debate is useful in revealing a belief in the basic premise that outside of spiritual, absolute truths, the temporal and contingent nature of signs in the world may indeed legitimate fictions as white lies which signify truths at a spiritual or anagogic level. A concise overview of the problem is given by C. S. Lewis when he discusses Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*.

The defence of poetry will not be rightly understood unless we keep two facts carefully in mind. In the first place, it is a defence not of poetry as against prose but of fiction as against fact. The word poetry often covered all imaginative writing whether in prose or verse, and even those critics who did not so extend it thought of poetry primarily as invention. What is in question is not man's right to sing but his right to feign, to 'make things up'. In the second place, the attack which necessitates this defence is not, save locally and accidentally, a puritan attack. In England, no doubt, most of the attackers were protestants. But so were most of the defenders. The controversy had begun far from England and long before the Reformation.

Boccaccio's *De genealogia deorum* (XIV and XV) is as much a defence as Sidney's *Apology*. So is Plutarch's *De Audiendis Poetis*. Our sixteenth - century critics are really contributing to, or concluding, an age-old debate; and that debate, properly viewed, is simply the difficult process by which Europe became conscious of fiction as an activity distinct from history on the one hand and from lying on the other.

It was, of course, Plato who opened this debate, and he made two very different contributions to it. On the one hand, in the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus*, he stated in an extreme form the doctrine of inspiration. He denied that poetry was an art. It was produced in a divine alienation of mind by men who did not know what they were doing. The non-human beings who were its real creators showed this by sometimes choosing as their mouthpiece the worst of men or even the worst of poets. On the other hand, in the *Republic* he condemned poetry along with all the other 'mimetic' or representational arts. This condemnation was two-sided. In part it is directed (and so indeed is his theory of inspiration) against the old error, still dangerous when Plutarch wrote, of mistaking art for science and treating Homer as an encyclopaedia. To that extent it was a real advance. In part it was metaphysical. Nature, the

phenomenal world, is in Plato's dualism a copy of the real and supersensuous world. Dialectic leads us up from unreal Nature to her real original. But the arts which imitate nature lead us down, further away from reality, to "the copy of a copy."<sup>313</sup>

As Lewis indicates, Plato's dismissal of the poetic is based on his belief that mimesis involves the reproduction of a reproduction; an imperfect sign of an illusion; there can never be an absolute mimesis, only an alternative and even more misleading reality. There were, however, other responses to the question of whether poetry was a lie, such as the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonic. In particular it is Aristotle who says that poetry does not copy the particulars of nature but disengages from apparent reality and represents its general or universal characteristics. In this way the poetic myth shows us what would necessarily or probably or possibly happen in all situations of a certain kind. In a particularly rhetorical sense the use of talking animals - though they are in a sense merely the mobilisation of a set of rhetorical devices - would, for Aristotle, have some metaphorical truth, the persuasive outcome of which would be moral betterment:

The use of persuasive speech is to lead to decisions. When we know a thing, and have decided about it, there is no further use in speaking about it. ... All orators are bound to use the topic of the possible and impossible: and to try to show that a thing has happened, or will happen in the future.<sup>314</sup>

In the *Poetics* Aristotle writes that:

The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of a thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse ... it consist really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean

<sup>313</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954) pp. 318 - 319.

<sup>314</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathon Barnes, Bollingen Series LXXI Vol. 2 (London: Princeton University Press, 1985) II.18. 1391b, 1.

one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do - which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters.<sup>315</sup>

For Aristotle, while history is limited to the particular and the actual the poet may attend to the universal in its potentiality, or *what may happen in the future*. For Henryson, as for Aristotle, the realm of the potential is placed higher than the realm of the actual because the potential scenarios of poetic fiction reveal things that are universally true to mankind and beast alike, and are thus more scientific than the particular events of a historical narrative. Henryson's mode clearly employs the idea that there are shared or universal attributes common to both man and animal:

A proper understanding of reality must depend on an understanding of that which is universal in it. In both ontological and (when dealing with rational beings) ethical terms, particular realities move towards the realisation of an ideal form, and they are to be understood in terms of the degree to which their assimilation within that ideal had been achieved. ... the specific details of the text and the distinctive features of the mode employed are subordinated to a prior set of universal values in relation to which their significance and function are defined. Such a viewpoint is fundamentally realist in its privileging of the universal. It embodies a faith in the possibility of aligning particular reality within the bounds of universal norms, this faith being underpinned by the conviction that to do so is not to neglect or retreat from important aspects of the realities of existence, but to depict that which is most real in it.<sup>316</sup>

For Aristotle only the universal is scientifically knowable and beasts and men can only be known by their universal or genus. In his use of the animal Henryson's imagined reality can encompass, and is dependant upon the shared or universal characteristics of man and animal, by compounding attributes of both in order to effect persuasion.

<sup>315</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathon Barnes, Bollingen Series LXXI Vol. 2 (London: Princeton University Press, 1985) 9. 1451 b1, 1 - 10.

<sup>316</sup> McGinley, Kevin, "The (r)uses of poetry: a study of the work of Robert Henryson in the context of scholastic literary theory", unpublished 1996 Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1997) p. 32.

What Henryson's defence of the beast fable demonstrates is his eagerness to legitimate his choice of the fable form as the discursive site addressing man's corporeal context, which he does by clarifying the distinction between the 'real' discourses of theology and philosophy, and the poetic mode in which he develops Christian theology in a practical context, and for a lay readership. By doing so he demonstrates that it is an authorised and accepted theological debate which underpins the fables. The advantage of the poetic is, of course, that it deals with and develops the official in an illustrative, didactic manner, and in analogous language appropriate to the imaginative context. Indeed, Aquinas provides a rigorous distinction between absolute and analogous modes of language which allow for the contingency of artistic discourse of the various problems not addressed by the 'official'.<sup>317</sup> The 'Prolog' constitutes an index to a plethora of doctrinal thought, indicated in a number of ways. Jamieson identifies Gualterus Anglicus' 'Prolog' to his version of Aesop's fables as Henryson's analogue. He examines both together in order to stress 'the theological and philosophical elements underlying *The Morall Fabillis*, elements which earlier collections, in which the fables deal with unrelated ethical problems, do not develop.'<sup>318</sup> But Henryson can be seen legitimately to develop doctrinal problems by appealing to the highest authority as the instigator of his text; in the reference to 'the great lord' required by the modesty or humility topos (*excusatio*) there is an uncertain figure who may, as R. D. S. Jack suggests, be God.<sup>319</sup> By the observance of the modesty topos in this way the critic could not reproach the faults of the form or Henryson's treatment of it, as this authority would negate any excuse for not attending to the doctrine which has been signified by Henryson to be present in his work. In addition, Henryson's 'How mony men in operatioun / Ar like to beistis in

<sup>317</sup> Discussed below.

<sup>318</sup> Jamieson, op cit., p 30. On the changes made to Gualterus' version see Fox, ed., Poems, p 274' Powell, M., 'Studies in the Background and interpretation of Henryson's *Morall Fabillis*' D.Phil thesis (University of York, 1980), pp 245 – 247; and I. W. A. Jamieson *ibid.*, pp. 104 – 143.

<sup>319</sup> Jack notes this in *The Mercat Anthology* (p. 281) though elsewhere he develops what is an important point given Henryson's quidditatively defined rhetorical, dialectic focus, signifying a final ontological end: 'medieval authors, seeing themselves as "efficient" (that is – 'caused') causes of their own work, readily accepted authorities greater than their own *because* they saw themselves humbly. Their aesthetics made them word artisans. Their metaphysics placed them as shadow-signs of the first cause using an inadequate signing system (words) within a referential mystery. Seen from this perspective, the phrase, 'Of quhome the name it neidis not record' becomes a series of particularly ambiguous strokes of the pen or sounds in the art. They suggest at once, that the exact identity of the 'first cause' of Henryson's tales is unimportant (human; rhetorical) and that its identity is 'so obvious that I need not name it' (God; metaphysical).' R. D. S. Jack, 'Henryson and the Art of Precise Allegorical Argument' in *The European Sun: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature* (University of Strathclyde 1993) ed. by Graham Care, Roderick J. Lyall, Sally Mapstone and Kenneth Simpson (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001).

conditioun' cites the theological and commonplace doctrine of comparing man and animal, pedagogically defined in relation to other textual definitions and commentary:

although God created the animals as inferior beings ("all Creature he mad ffor the behufe / Off man"), and made man "last off all, / Lyke to his image and his similitude," man often degrades himself to the level of animals, because "our saull with sensualitie / So fetterit is in presoun Corporall" [ll. 1671 – 72, 1668 – 69, 1629 – 30]. The central joke of the *Fables*, that of animals speaking and acting like men (or animals bodies with human minds) remains an excellent joke, but it also has a deadly serious side.<sup>320</sup>

The complex artistic structures and discussion in the fables is, in this way, posited on a simple theologically commonplace premise which has biblical authority :

*Magis autem eos qui post carnem in concupiscentia immunditiae ambulant, dominationemque contemnunt. Audaces, sibi placentes, sectas non metuunt introducere blasphemantes, ubi angeli fortitudine et virtute cum sint maiores, non portant adversum se execrabile iudicium. Hi vero velut irrationabilia pecora naturaliter in captionem et in perniciem in his quae ignorant blasphemantes, in corruptione sua peribunt.*

[... and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries. Whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the lord. But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand and will utterly perish in their own corruption ... ]

(2 Peter 2. 10 - 12)<sup>321</sup>

That mankind has habitual and bestial tendencies after the fall, and that he should be mindful to aspire to a higher purpose indicates the basic tenets of Christian thought, and is especially

<sup>320</sup> Denton Fox, 'Henryson's *Fables*' in *English Literary History*, 29 (1962), pp. 337 - 56 (p. 341).

<sup>321</sup> This is used extensively in exegesis by Boethius, in the *Cloud of Unknowing* and in Bartholomaeus' *Anglicus De animalibus*, and I deal with its use below.



evident in those instances where Henryson draws attention to the dual characteristics of mankind's nature. Henryson takes doctrinal correlations between human and beast and presents them in a way which is complicated by virtue of the requirement of the audience to make moral distinctions and evaluations for themselves. The correlation between man and animal, used in conjunction with the nut and kernel metaphor, provides Henryson with an established doctrinal basis for his teaching and discussion, a critical criterion for his audience, and an illustration of the dialectic necessity of figurative language.

### 3. 3 (b) Metaphor and doctrine

Such exposition of the doctrinal comparison is particularly evident in the reference to the nut and kernel, which is in turn the citation of a multiplicitous metaphor concerning reason and logos:

The nuttis schell, thocht it be hard and teuch,  
Haldis the kinnell, sweit and delectabill;  
Sa lyis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch.

(Prologue, 15 - 17).

Jamieson demonstrates how Henryson takes the image of the nut's shell and kernel directly from Gualterus and understands the doctrine as the kernel contained *within* the shell itself, noting too that Henryson's words here would 'seem to condemn those who refuse to take his ethical and religious preoccupations seriously.'<sup>322</sup> In penetrating the meaning of the fables, Henryson explains, the doctrine will be revealed, effectively signalling that his discourse has the official authority of a range of exegetical writers, and that as such accepted authorities are present within his poetry and provide it with the 'doctrine wyse aneuch' which he develops.

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<sup>322</sup> Jamieson *op cit.*, p. 30.

In particular Henryson's use of the nut and kernel metaphor imports Augustine as a prime doctrinal and theological authority while simultaneously ensuring the accretive significance of the husk of the material or bestial body and the meaning or logos contained within it. At the literal level this signs the metaphysical nature of the argument to be employed in the fables; the 'nuttis schell, thocht it be hard and teuch' contains a 'delectabill' kernel, indicating that an understanding of the fables and of the doctrine which it elucidates will only come with some considerable effort. In this context the metaphor is explained by reference to a twelfth - century commentary on the *Thebaid* of Statius :

the compositions of poets seem not uncommonly to invite comparisons with a nut. Just as there are two parts to a nut, the shell and the kernel, so there are two parts to poetic compositions, the literal and the allegorical meaning. As the Kernel is hidden under the shell so the allegorical [*figuræ*] interpretation is hidden under the literal meaning; as the shell must be cracked to get the kernel so the literal must be broken for the allegories to be discovered.<sup>323</sup>

The term allegory (*figuræ*) in this passage refers to the meanings which are concealed beneath the literal sense of poetry. But it is the literal sense which also gives access to meaning; it is necessary to break the surface tension of the literal sense, or in the metaphorical terms of the text, the husk. At the literal sense a cock is a cock and a nut just a nut. For the commentator the use of the nut and kernel is a topos which signals a discourse on the metaphoricity of metaphors. What the commentary highlights in terms of the fables is that in poetic modes and language the animal *only* has metaphoricity, being 'not al grundid vpon truth'.

It is at the figurative level, however, that the metaphor evokes theological issues concerning both the nature of corrupted signs, and mankind's corruption. When Henryson states that 'Sa lyis thair ane doctrine wyse aneuch' the word that stands out is, of course, *doctrine*, implying as it does that both the nut and kernel metaphor, or the doctrine which it contains, is taken from a significant authority who brings theological validity to the poetic text. Jamieson suggests that a theological context, or *para-text*, for the *Morall Fabillis* is *The Cloud of*

<sup>323</sup> Leslie Whitbread, trans., *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971) p. 239.

*Unknowing*.<sup>324</sup> The text is useful in providing a context: ‘before er man synnid was the sensuylte so obedyent vnto the witte ..... alle oure levyng schall be more beestly and fleschly than ovther manly or goostly.’<sup>325</sup> However, there is *no* evidence that Henryson was aware of, had access to a copy of, or had read, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the use of the word *doctrine* would seem to suggest a much broader relevance to the metaphor employed than a single textual analogue. Nonetheless, what setting the two texts together reveals is the shared theme of the choices to be made by man, who is at once a perfect soul abiding in a beastly, deadly body. Reason, as part of his nature, might have been all that man needed before the fall, says the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*: ‘but now it is so blinded with the original sin that it cannot work this work unless it be illumined by Grace ... Will is a power through which we choose good.’<sup>326</sup> The significance of illumination, ‘by a man’s brain is ghostly understood imagination; for by nature it dwelleth and worketh in the head’, is illustrated by the *Cloud*-poet with the nut and kernel metaphor: ‘therefore let us pick off the rough bark and feed us with the sweet kernel.’<sup>327</sup>

This particular use of the metaphor is significant because it draws on Augustine as a prime doctrinal and theological authority.<sup>328</sup> Augustine, explaining the difference between the literal and the figurative states: ‘inside its attractive shell this husk is a jangle of fine sounding stones: but it is the food of pigs, not men’,<sup>329</sup> devaluing any interpretation which involves the literal sense alone. He states that ‘when something meant figuratively is

<sup>324</sup> Jamieson, *op cit.*, p. 37. Though Jamieson does not identify a specific point of reference in the text, he clearly refers to chapter 65.

<sup>325</sup> Justin McCann, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises*, (London: Burns Oates, 1952) ch. 65.

<sup>326</sup> *Cloud* ch. 64.

<sup>327</sup> *Cloud* ch. 58.

<sup>328</sup> It is generally accepted that *The Cloud of Unknowing* is essentially Augustinian, relying as it does upon analogues and doctrine directly from Augustine, as well as amongst others, Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of Saint-Victor (*Benjamin Major*). For a comprehensive discussion see J. P. H. Clark, ‘Sources and Theology in “The Cloud of Unknowing”’ in *The Downside Review* 98 (April 1980) pp. 83 - 110. In particular it can be seen that when Augustine discusses the name of God he describes how man may no longer see Him now that mankind inhabits a fallen existence. God may no longer be found in a fallen material sign. As he is *incommutabilis*, God is properly *Essentia*, not *substantia*; his attributes are not accidental characteristics, liable to change, but reside instead within His Being (*De Trinitate*, 5, 2, 3 PL 42, 912, citing Exodus 3. 14). As with Augustine’s sign theory, the illumination of the intellect by the grace of God is fideistically enclosed, the necessity of faith preceding that of intellectual understanding. Thus the cloud of unknowing becomes as metaphor for fallenness: it is as a consequence of sin that man can no longer see God in *this* life. Only in the move from carnal to spiritual love and faith (*Sermo* 143, PL, 38, 786) will allow some retrieval of understanding.

<sup>329</sup> *DDoC* 3. 1.

interpreted literally, it is understood in a carnal way,<sup>330</sup> referring to man's inability to understand the literal significance of corporeal things.

Thus, Henryson's evocation of the nut and kernel metaphor not merely assists the critical criterion that he has laid down with an authorised, imagistic metaphor, but indicates that any sign in the fallen and temporally contingent world cannot have absolute truth, though contingent signs *may* signify spiritual or absolute truth. Once again the 'real' or the 'truthful' exists in the realm of the real where metaphorical truth may signify an absolute ontological truth, which a fallen creation can never contain or signify absolutely. Indeed the metaphor that Henryson uses to illustrate his suggested interpretative strategy for the fables is also, as in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the bodily human skull, the kernel or lesson already contained within the mind or *logos*. Both Augustine's and Henryson's use of this metaphor highlights the dynamic instability of the human - animal dichotomy by observing that meaning is present in the human animal *and* in the significance of the beast, but that such meaning will always be contingent to the perceiver, who must look to himself and to God for the truth of the sign.<sup>331</sup> Paradoxically, Augustine's doctrine of illumination, then, would seem to signify that doctrine itself is a bad reflection of ontological reality, requiring a creative exegesis by individuals in order better to understand God's intention. But by his choice of the metaphor Henryson also answers the charge that fables are a lie with the response that all discourses, be they 'official' or 'poetic' are a potential disruption or distortion of Truth when not fideistically enclosed by the pre-existent faith which will guide the reader to a correct understanding of the moral content of the text and the Truth which it signifies.

<sup>330</sup> *DDoC* 3. 5., 9.

<sup>331</sup> Though I mean to imply no direct correspondence or analogue between the two texts, Julian of Norwich's *Showings* present a similar eschatological understanding of the significance of a hazelnut. For her it represents creation in microcosm and at the same time provides her with an understanding that no matter how small or apparently insignificant a thing is, it is created, and therefore, loved by its creator.

And in this he [God] shewed a little thing, the quantitie of an haselnott, lying in þe palme of my hand, as me semide, and it was as rounde as a balle. I looked theran *with* the eye of my vnderstanding, and thought: What may this be? And it was answered generally thus: / It is all that is made. I marvayled how it might laste, for me thought it might sodenly haue fallen to nawght for littleness. And I was answered in my vndersanding: It listeth and ever shall, for god loueth it: and so hath all thing being by loue of god. In this little thing I saw iij propertes. The first is *pat* god made it, the second that god loueth it, the thirde that god kepyth it. But what behyld I ther in? Verely, the maker, the keeper, the louer.

In this context Julian goes on to point out the importance of the animal in relation to man and God – the Theocentric unity between Christ and all creation - for when He was in pain we were in pain, and all creatures able to suffer in pain suffered with him. Julian of Norwich, *A Book Of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vol., ed. by E. Colledge and J. Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediæval Studies, 1978), vol. 2. Ch. 5 rev. 1. pp. 299 - 300.

### 3. 3 (c) Fables and Ideal Forms

Augustine also offers a critical criterion for understanding the poetic and makes direct reference to fables. He suggests that it is not important whether certain animals existed or not: what is important was their meaning. In *Contra mendacium* he defends Aesop's fables against the charge that they were lies, stating '*quod utique totum fingitur, ut ad rem quae intenditur, ficta quidem narratione, non mendaci tamen, sed veraci significatione veniatur*',<sup>332</sup> through a fictitious narrative a true signification may be referred to the matter at hand. Augustine's doctrine of lying is typical of his moral theology generally, operating as it does *sub specie aeternitatis*, rather than from the perspective of human temporality. Simply put, this means that any human sufferings entailed in telling the truth should be weighed against the eternal values which are of immeasurably greater consequence: and in this way human suffering should be tolerated for the sake of truth. In the context of the fable however, its fictitious narrative should be seen as a temporal occurrence which involves expression and representation in a fallen language, and is therefore contingent upon interpretation. While the fable may, in this way, be a lie, the lie is a contingency which should be tolerated as a white lie, and off-set against gaining the spiritual truth of which the animals are persuasive signs. Boccaccio develops the idea when he states that he

had supposed that a lie was a certain very close counterfeit of the truth which served to destroy the true and substitute the false. Augustine mentions eight kinds of lies, of which some are, to be sure, graver than others, yet none, if we employ them consciously, free from sin and the mark of infamy that denotes a liar. If the enemies of poetry will consider fairly the meaning of this definition, they will become aware that their charge of falsehood is without force, since poetic fiction has nothing in common with any variety of falsehood, for it is not a poet's purpose to deceive anybody with his inventions. ... My opponents will add that

<sup>332</sup> Augustine, *Contra Mendacium*, in *PL*, col. 538.

their writings are not fiction but rather figures, to use the correct term, and their authors are figurative writers.<sup>333</sup>

Boccaccio discusses the dialectic bases of the syllogism of philosophy which are not considered damnable. The fable has honourable origins, we are told, and if it is a sin to compose stories it is also, therefore, a sin to converse. Invention, rather, illustrates or proves an idea. Looking back to Augustine, Boccaccio also draws a distinction between wilful deception and extolling through illustration. Where Augustine mentions eight kinds of lie, and all are sin and infamous if entered into consciously, poetic fiction is free from the charge of lying because it is not the poet's intention or *purpose* to deceive anybody with invention. *Fabulae* obviously bears no resemblance to the 'real' truth. Equally for Boethius, man must consider his beginnings and God his author, and realise that no man is degenerate in this sense, as the truth of fiction lies with God its author.<sup>334</sup>

### 3. 3 (d) Henryson's use of the animal as analogy

Henryson's use of the comparison between man and beast draws on the similarity between their respective physical states, with the singular difference that man has a rational, reasoning soul which animals do not possess. Because of the complex notion that man both shares and does not share qualities with animals, the chosen fable genre allows Henryson to explore the human with an analogy which is suited to imaginative logic whose final cause (*causa finalis*) is persuasion and the effective moving (*delectatio*) of the audience by his creative skill. The correction of human folly through symbolism and figurative language is a critical element of the fables, the importance of which is recognised by other participants of

<sup>333</sup> Boccaccio, *De genealogia deorum*, XIV, xiii 'poets are not liars', trans. by Charles, G. Osgood, *op cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>334</sup> *The Consolation Of Philosophy* 3. 5. See also Conrad of Hirsau, for whom the role of the poet is either to be useful or to give pleasure. Conrad points out that the reader *knows* that fables were invented so that by introducing the fictitious conversation of dumb animals or insensible objects, certain similarities in human morals and behaviour might be criticised. Invented stories about human events and characters correspond with the truth, even if only in a certain sense. The poet's purpose, in these terms, is to describe the ignorance and stupidity of those who err, and thus to summon the straying conscience back to a state of goodness by these comparisons. Conrad of Hirsau, *Dialogue on the authors*, 'on Aesopic invention' cited in Minnis and Scott *op cit.*, pp. 47 - 49.

the 'invention' debate who are keen to observe that divine authority approves analogous comparison.

Hear what our lord himself says: "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests" [Matt. 8. 20; Luke 9. 58] and again: "say to that fox" [Luke 13. 32], that is to Herod, comparing his wiliness to that of a wild beast. You will find many things of this sort in Holy Scripture where insensible objects are moulded to fit good or bad human qualities, so that a comparison with the lower creature may show whether the God-given grace of the superior being has been increased or lost.<sup>335</sup>

The focus here is a particularly theological one, rather than the popular one which Henryson as a teacher chooses in the fables, though it demonstrates the preoccupation with the justification of figurative language and metaphor. Of particular importance in this context is Henryson's collation of the idea of animals as figurative representatives of men, with the syllogistic moral logic which they espouse.

My author in his Fabillis tellis how  
That brutal beistis spak and vnderstude,  
And to gude purpois dispute and argow,  
Ane sillogisme propone and eik conclude;  
Putting exempill and similitude  
How mony men in operatioun  
Ar like to beistis in conditioun.

Na mervell is ane man be lyke a beist,  
Quhilk lufis ay carnall and foull delyte,  
That schame can not him ren3e nor arreist  
Bot takis all the lust and appetite,  
Quhilk throw custom and the daylie ryte  
Syne in the mynd sa fast is redicate  
That he in brutal beist is transformate.

<sup>335</sup> Boccaccio *op cit.*, pp. 47 - 48.

(Prologue, 43 - 56).

At first sight this is an uncomplicated expression of the sentential mode of Henryson's rhetoric and the animal context in which it operates. In the first stanza Henryson describes how animal fables depict 'brutal beistis' behaving as humans and using logic in a way which suggests that they are acquainted with and understand the importance of reason. R. D. S. Jack states that Henryson

... educates 'be figure of ane uther thing' 'figure' – in its strictly rhetorical sense means that he will use figures of speech to suggest ideas. In the *Morall Fabillis*, for example, he will make brutal beasts appear to speak and understand. Because they share part of our soul, the animal part, but do not share the higher, rational component reserved for humanity, they provide ideal analogies (similar to, yet different from) the human state.<sup>336</sup>

Henryson's teaching method, in other words, will involve the representation of animals behaving, as some humans, in elevated or noble ways, and with the benefit of self knowledge and awareness. They will have particular experiences and form from them morally advantageous conclusions about a life limited to carnal desires. As the second stanza here states the moral lessons concern the avoidance of 'carnall and foull delyte' or characteristic behaviour which transforms the human in a 'real' sense, into brutal beasts. From this it can be seen that the 'brutal beistis' which speak and reason in the fictional world of the fables are *not* the same as the 'brutal beistis' into which men are transformed by habitual carnal acts, and Henryson urges the reader to keep two separate concepts of the beast clearly in mind.

In drawing attention to the figurative nature of the fables in response to the lying charge Henryson highlights that the literal 'lie' should be excused as part of his teaching method, which aims to highlight doctrine, and use animals as metaphorical expression of a higher meaning. But when he says that the fables teach 'be figure of an vther thing' he also claims

<sup>336</sup> Jack, R. D. S., 'The Sense of an Ending' in *The Cloak of Poetry: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference of The Robert Henryson Society 2000*, ed. by Morna R. Fleming (Dunfermline: The Robert Henryson Society, 2001) pp. 61 - 84, (p. 64).



that his use of the word figure comes from his translation of his 'author' Aesop,<sup>337</sup> though as already shown this use of figure evidently comes directly from Gualterus Anglicus Latin fables.

Denton Fox's analysis of Eric Auerbach's discussion of figural writing in his essay '*Figura*' provides a compelling argument based on the typological interpretation of the events of the Old Testament, which were seen as historically 'true', but also prefigured (*figuræ*) events of the New Testament, or in fact, Christianity. Where Auerbach states that '[f]igural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first',<sup>338</sup> Fox observes that 'Henryson's animals while remaining animals signify men, while we are continually reminded that men encompass or fulfil (but sometimes are no better than) animals.'<sup>339</sup> At first glance this particular statement would seem to be a useful hermeneutic, though the broader argument of the essay is one which Phillipa M. Bright sees as limited and problematic. The problem as she states it, is that Auerbach's essay is

Based on Latin writing of the first to sixth centuries [and that] it focuses on the relationship between the term *figure* and the typological method of writing and interpretation. Auerbach acknowledges that figure was also used in conjunction with the more abstract, ethical kind of allegory and that in the Middle Ages "there were all sorts of mixtures between figural, allegoric and symbolic forms," [Auerbach 64] but he stresses the dominance of the typological mode and does not explore further complexities, such as the fact that although medieval exegetes believed in the historical truth of the events they were interpreting, they often ignored or dissolved historical contexts when uncovering the real meaning of such events.<sup>340</sup>

Bright makes an important point which she does not develop but is worth stating here as it the way in which the effectively humanocentric typology treats the animal as an

<sup>337</sup> References also include 'Figure' (59), 'typis figurall' (589), 'figurate' (600), 'fabill figurall' (1099), 'figure' (1258), 'vnder the figure off ane brutal beist' (1400), 'similitude of figures' (2593), 'figurate' (2935).

<sup>338</sup> Eric Auerbach, '*Figura*' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, ed. by D. Bethurum and trans. by Ralph Manheim (1959; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) p. 53.

<sup>339</sup> Fox, *op cit.*, 1962, p. 341.

<sup>340</sup> Phillipa M. Bright, 'Medieval Concepts of the figure and Henryson's Figurative Technique', in *The Fables, Studies in Scottish Literature*, 25, (1990) pp. 134 - 153 (p. 136).

inconsequential sign. In the context of scripture, for example, The Bible differs from other kinds of writing in offering a text which manifests its sacred truths not only through words, but also by means of the signification of “Things”:

the manifestation or expression of some truth is sometimes able to be made concerning things and words, in as much no doubt as words signify things and one thing is able to be a figure of another. Indeed, the author of things is not only able to use words to signify something, but is also able to arrange a thing as a figure of another thing. And in accordance with this, in Sacred Scripture, truth is manifested doubly. According to one way since things are signified through words: and in this way the literal sense is formed; according to another way, since things are figures of other things and in this way the spiritual sense is formed.<sup>341</sup>

The truths manifested by means of these types of symbolism, Aquinas explains, pertain to the spiritual sense, while those expressed by means of words involve only the literal sense. Aquinas makes use of the term *figure* in the specifically typological mode of figuration in which the Old Testament foreshadows or prefigures (*figura*) the New Testament, and where the mode of figuration in which the Old and New together signify, or are considered to be a prefiguration (*figura*) of heavenly things. This typology provides no perceptible hermeneutic for Henryson’s fables, the animals of The Bible having little or no significance in Aquinas’ typological mode. Jonah and the whale, for example, can be seen as a typological allegory of Christ’s descent into hell, which is prefigured by Jonah as a faithless man, being encased in the deathly body of the whale for three days, and from which death he ultimately rises. Typologically the New Testament equivalent is the resurrection of Christ after his three days in hell. One prefigures the other, but together the comparison signifies God’s preordained purpose to be present in events even before Christ’s coming [Matt. 12. 40 - 42]. Within this the meaning of the animal is limited to negative connotations of burial in the deathly and has otherwise limited meaning. Similarly, Abraham goes out into the wilderness with his son in order to sacrifice him, and prove his devotion to God. The disturbing scenario, which raises ethical and philosophical questions both about Abraham’s motivation as well as God’s

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<sup>341</sup> Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, 6a. 1. extracted from Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Hugh Bredin (1959: London: Yale University Press, 1986) pp. 60 - 62.

omniscience, is answered by the New Testament. Isaac is to be a 'burnt offering' and carries the wood for his own pyre upon his back. Abraham 'laid it on Isaac his son' and when Isaac asks his father where the lamb is for the sacrifice, Abraham says that 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.' When Abraham is about to kill Isaac, the angel of the lord intervenes, providing instead a ram, which is caught in a near-by thicket by its horns (Gen. 22. 1 - 3). Aquinas' typological mode would interpret this episode as one which prefigures God's sacrifice of his only son, the Lamb of God who carries the cross on his back and is sacrificed on the cross, and who like Isaac is risen from his own death. While the two episodes together signify the ontological importance of the crucifixion, apart from drawing our attention to the comparison of Christ to an innocent lamb, what they do not do is see the animal itself as significant.

Another aspect of *figure*, as has already been observed, is that though a thing might not be 'real' or believable in a material sense, it may have a metaphorical truth, the truth of its idea or essence, which signifies an absolute reality. This is expressed in *Quaestiones Qudlibetales* where Aquinas sees that both scripture and poetic fiction transmit truths extending beyond the literal level, however incredible they may seem. Truth, for Aquinas, exists not merely in relation to the literary context but rather emerges from realising that its events indicate a higher or veiled truth. The 'corporeal' or actual reality, though imperfect and inferior, transmits the potential truth of the idea.<sup>342</sup>

Any discussion of 'figure' must also consider Dante, who sees that it could be unnecessary, or even meaningless when used incorrectly. In *La Vita Nuova* Dante had objected to poets who cover their subject with figure and rhetorical ornament to create fables, 'ancient poets spoke of inanimate things as if they had sense and reason, and made them talk to each other ... as if they were substances and men'<sup>343</sup> but who prove incapable of divesting literary devices and ornament to reveal their true intention or meaning. Dante states that

<sup>342</sup> Aquinas, *Quaestiones Qudlibetales*, 7. 6, 3. cited by Eco, *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>343</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, Trans. by Barbara Reynolds (Harmonsworth: Penguin 1969) 25, 50 - 55.

it would be a disgrace if someone composing in rhyme introduced a figure of speech or rhetorical ornament, and then on being asked could not divest his words of such covering so as to reveal a true meaning.<sup>344</sup>

Later, in *Il Convivio*, he points out that the literal and allegorical should be seen from two distinctive points of view – that of the ‘allegory of the poets’ and the ‘allegory of the theologians’. For Dante secular allegory is essentially moral, as opposed to the typological sense of scripture:

He points out that the first sense is the literal and ‘is that sense which does not go beyond that enunciated by the fictitious word, as in the fables (*favole*) of poets. The next is called allegorical, and this is that which hides beneath the mantle (*manto*) of such fables, and is truth hidden beneath a falsehood ... Truly speaking, theologians and poets use this sense in different ways ...’<sup>345</sup>

Even though Dante’s description of the literal and allegorical depends upon words, it is ‘things’ that signify having more meaning than words, which are merely signs of signs.

In theological texts three allegorical senses (allegorical, moral, and anagogic) may be found, but in poetry only secular allegory. This secular allegory, ‘which is essentially moral and to that extent unified and “one” ... can develop different layers or levels, but these do not match the several senses of scripture identified by theologians...’<sup>346</sup> As Minnis observes, that this distinction is not clearly explained may be due to the complexity of the term *allegoria*. However, a rigorous explanation is provided by Aquinas. As with Dante’s distinction between the two types of allegory which relate to different types of text and language usage, Aquinas negotiates the problem of the contingency of language by designating *all* language as figurative when it is not used in direct proportion to its principal referent and originator, God. By the same criteria Henryson’s fables present animals that are as figurative as the sentence (*sententia*) that they speak. Indeed, any allegorical or figurative

<sup>344</sup> *La Vita Nuova*, *ibid.*, 25, 81 - 84.

<sup>345</sup> Dante Alighieri, ‘*Il Convivio*, Tract. II: *Voi che ’ntendendo* and Extracts from its exposition’ in Minnis and Scott, *op cit.*, p. 396, *cf.*, Boccaccio makes the distinction that ‘Sacred Scripture has three ways of conveying meaning – namely, history, allegory, and tropology’ in *Didascalicon op cit.*, V. ii, p. 120.

<sup>346</sup> Minnis and Scott, *op cit.* p. 383.

interpretation is *dependent* upon the contingency of language, figure and analogy being employed to represent other things whose meaning is in some way irretrievably obscure at the literal sense of the meaning. Aquinas explains that language still provides a sign, though it can not mean in relation to God what it means to temporal things. There are certain modes, however, such as the analogous use of language, which offer some retrieval of meaning. Aquinas approaches the problem by arguing firstly that speaking about God involves using words that normally apply to things in the everyday world then secondly, asking how these two different uses relate to each other. Drawing a distinction between the *univocal* and the *equivocal* use of words, he designates that the *univocal* is where a word means exactly the same wherever and whenever it is used. The *equivocal* on the other hand, is where the same word is used, but has different meanings. Aquinas argues that words cannot really be used *univocally* to refer to both God and humanity, because of the gulf between them. Yet, the word, in this sense, is neither used *equivocally*, as if it referred to something completely different.

*Dicendum quod impossibile est aliquid praedicari de Deo et creature univoce. Quia omnis effectus non adaequans virtutem causae agentis recipit similitudinem agentis non secundum eandem rationem, sed deficienter; ita et quod divisim et multipliciter est in effectibus, in causa est simpliciter et eodem modo; sicut sol secundum una, virtutem, multiformes et varias formas in istis inferioribus producit. Eodem modo, ut supra dictum est, omnes rerum perfectiones quae sunt in rebus creatis divisim et multipliciter, in Deo praeexistunt unite. Sic igitur cum aliquod nomen ad perfectionem pertinens de creatura dicitur, significant illam perfectionem distinctam secundum rationem distinctionis ad alis; puta cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, significamus aliquam perfectionem distinctam ab essenentia hominis, et a potentia et ab esse ipsius, et ab omnibus huiusmodi. [It is not possible to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures. The reason for this is that every effect which is less than its cause does not adequately represent it, in that the effect is thus not the same sort of thing as the cause. So that which exists in a variety of divided forms in the effects, exists also simply and in a unified way in the cause: just as the simple power of the sun produces many different kinds of lesser things. In the same way ... the many and varied perfections in creatures pre-exist in God in a single and*

unified / united form. ... So the words that we use in speaking of creatures differ in meaning, and each of them signifies a perfection which is distinct from all the others. Thus: when we say that a man is wise, we signify his wisdom as something distinct from other things about him – such as his essence, his powers, or his existence. But, when we use this word in relation to God, we do not intend to signify something distinct from his essence, power, or existence].<sup>347</sup>

Aquinas concludes that there is a relation between the use of a word to refer to God and its use in a human context, or as he puts it, there is an analogy that is a certain proportion between them (*nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, id est, proportionem*). Where, in the created world a word, such as *wise* might signify an aspect of a man's humanity, what *wise* signifies in relation to God is not limited by our meaning of the word, but rather, goes beyond it. Thus the word is used in different senses: 'words cannot be used univocally of God and creatures' he states, though they may draw an analogy between the word's meaning in its spiritual usage, and that of its temporal. Aquinas goes on to point out that all words used metaphorically in relation to God apply primarily to creatures and secondarily to God. If this is applied to the fable animals it becomes clear that Aquinas' understanding would be that what is spoken of in terms of God must be determined on the basis of its meaning in relation to animals in the corporeal context first, according to the similarity of proportion (*secundum similitudinem proportionis*).<sup>348</sup>

As Henryson's fictional mode is defined with considerable precision, carefully delimiting how his use of figure and metaphor should be understood, and his mode quidditatively defined grammatically, rhetorically, and morally, it is clear that the animal should be understood (in fictional text and doctrinal context) as man, sharing as it does the same genus of animal – and sharing similarity of body. Understanding the moral content of the fables, however, requires that our understanding is disrupted, that language does not alone contain meaning – and that we do relate to the animal as the moral sign through which our own lives are morally mirrored.

<sup>347</sup> *ST* part 1, 1a, Q. 13, art. v.

<sup>348</sup> *ST* part 1, 1a, Q. 13, art. vi.

3. 3 (e) Summary

While Henryson’s use of the animal compounds the doctrinal premise that man should aspire to be different from beasts, it also complicates it. In taking the human animal back to the realm of the beast, the boundaries which he would seem to want to solidify remain undefined. Henryson’s poetic allegory, as distinct from the ‘official’ or doctrinal, defamiliarises what man’s position is. In fact, it *stresses* the interrelationship, similarity and two way–ness of the way medieval thought configures the animal by the comparison which it makes. Part of the problem is that at a moral or tropological level there is such a range of meaning, and such a contrast between the tales and their *moralitas*. The contingencies of fictional language at this level always remain contingent: ‘[n]ever does a Moral state that the story seeks to convey an absolute truth. The language is always contingent, conditional and personalised. “This selie scheip *may present*,” “this wolf I *likkin to*,” “Sad sentence *men may seek*,” “My brother ... be this fabill thow *may persave and se*.” Such are the particular suggested paths of persuasion offered by these images to lead better lives.’<sup>349</sup> The morals are not what the reader may expect and are never absolutely prescribed but are the nut left for the reader to crack.

It is generally accepted that the fables follow two analogues, these being the Aesopic and Renardian. Denton Fox’s ordering follows the logic of the clear pattern which places ‘The Lion and the Mouse’ at the epicentre of the 400 stanzas, making for a perfect symmetry and logical thematic unity.<sup>350</sup> Accordingly the fables would fall into an ordering dictated by the two analogues, which appeared thus:

Fable:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Source:	Aesop / Renard				Aesop / Renard				Aesop / Renard				Aesop

<sup>349</sup> Jack 2001, *op cit.*, p. 6.  
<sup>350</sup> Fox, lxxviii – lxxix.

But Phillipa Bright has noted that the fables may be classified according to three, rather than two, apparent sets of figurative technique. The first encompasses such fables as 'The Two Mice, The Fox and the Wolf' and 'The Wolf and the Wether', in which the animal protagonists are metaphoric representatives of the human world and have a single referent only in that the fable narrative concludes with a general moral statement which either sums up the main idea of the fable ('The Two Mice') or explains what the fable illustrates. In the second group, the concluding moralisation of each of the fables sees Henryson following the exegetical practice of reducing the narrative to a number of parts and of providing one-to-one correspondences for each part. In the case of 'The Cock and the Fox' and 'The Wolf and the Lamb' the figurative meaning expounded in the *moralitas* is the metaphoric sense of the fable, arising out of what the animal protagonists, as metaphors for human beings, say and do in the narrative. The third classification comprises 'The Sheep and the Dog', 'The Cock and the Jasp', 'The Trial of the Fox', 'The Preaching of the Swallow', 'The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadgear' and 'The Fox, The Wolf and the Husbandman', which are tales offering an additional sense in which the meaning expounded in the *moralitas* co-exists with the literal narrative and extends and complements it thematically.

This third group, whose 'additional sense' involves the animal as a syntagmatic, thematic, adjunct that intersects with the diachronic doctrinal material underlying the text, is my point of focus. In 'The Cock and the Jasp' this is clearly evident in the disruption between tale and *moralitas*. Where tale plus the *moralitas* provides figurative analogies, or the signifier and the signified provide the sign, the additional sense of the animal's misreading and coincidence of its appetitive soul bifurcates the moral sign. Henryson states that he has chosen animals *because* they are close to man, sharing the animal soul in 'operatioun'. When he goes on to posit similarity in 'conditioun,' he is in the realm of invention for man's soul the additional element of reason, which makes that 'conditioun' different. But neither category is discrete, as the appetitive soul is shared and in certain situations human and animal needs may coincide. Fox comments that:

The 'Tale of the Cok and the Jasp,' which opens the collection, illustrates this strategy very clearly. The story of the starving bird raises the question of rejecting a jewel in the case of starvation, a 'conditioun' shared by man and animal with a shared



implication in sensible ‘operatioun’. It would be silly for either man or beast to scorn luxuries when necessities are the thing. Henryson, then, imaginatively changes the premises in the moral to highlight a case where reason makes man’s problem different. ‘Let us suppose the jewel represents knowledge and then re-run the case.’ This is the subtle challenge to the reader. The drama of dialectical subversion involves the intellects of an audience, who are constantly being asked to review their understanding of an apparently simple test.<sup>351</sup>

‘This gentill iasp ... Betakinnis perfite prudence’ (‘The Cock and the Jasp’ 127 - 128). It is an immutable symbol of spiritual knowledge and illumination, described in contrast to the food the cock seeks as ‘eternall meit’ (‘Jasp’, 140). The moralised jasp is given a single signification out of the many possible. It represents knowledge – and, specifically, the duty of academics to bring that knowledge back into the ‘real’ world. Although the syllogism mentioned in the prologue is limited because there is no animal interaction in this tale, what is clear is that while the cock may be ignorant of his spiritual needs, he is also modest and commonsensical, dismissing the jewel in honourable terms: ‘Rise, gentill iasp, of all stanis the flour’ (‘Jasp’, 110). He has merely missed the point of an allegory concerning the neglect of the divine in men, which is ambiguous without the explanation of the *moralitas*, because it is outside of his realm.

In this way the *moralitas* is dependent upon the ambiguity generated by it being the animal who, as a fictive addition to reasoning, propounds a logic of uniquely human doctrinal thought. Making animals speak takes Christian reason a further step away from God, and from the rules of how to think about God. You can allegorise all you like – and Henryson does it well. But his allegory *draws attention to* the basis of shared similarities and characteristics. In this world man remains an animal and shares these characteristics. Giving moral agency to animals may highlight this similarity, nevertheless; it remains that Henryson’s fictions also highlight the rhetorical, the figurative, and types, which presuppose their agency: a wylie wolf and the sly fox, are the imposition of human choices on the animal as a space which is theologically pre-occupied. Animals may ‘be figure’ but this merely highlights the one ‘real’ and evident truth that animals may only really ‘be’. In being so they

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<sup>351</sup> Fox *Ibid.*, p. 10.

may indeed make us look at ourselves and reproach us for our unchristian living. To understand this we need only to follow Augustine's advice and look inward to find the truth.

### 3. 4 The fall of man and the 'repreif ... of thi misleving' in Henryson's *Morall Fabillis*.

In the prologue to the *Morall Fabillis*, Robert Henryson states that example and similitude show '[H]ow mony men in operatioun / Ar like to beistis in condition.' (Prologue, 48 - 49) highlighting the fallenness of material creation and the theological and pedagogically commonplace doctrine of comparing man and animal. Denton Fox sees the central 'joke' of the *Fables* to be that of animals having human minds, though it is edged by a deadly serious side.<sup>352</sup> The focus of this section is that deadly serious side; the interrelationship of animal and man in their fallen nature and theological state. It aims to define the understanding of the fall in the *Fables* which at the literal sense at least constitute an explication of man's condition in the worldly or corporeal context. It also asks: are there ethical questions about animals which are repressed and occluded in medieval theology, but which are evident in medieval literature? Indeed, if medieval writers see the animal as irretrievably fallen, how can anything be learned from it, either literally or figuratively? As Augustine and Aquinas define and re-define the concepts of fallenness, my reading of the *Fables* is based on Augustine's sign theory and Aquinas' argument from design, both of which are reconciled by the understanding of man as a microcosm of creation.

Henryson's *Fables* present a view of human moral success and failure through their reconstruction of animal behaviour, thereby reinforcing the values important in society. However, in Henryson's bestial world animals, rather than humans, emphasise moral messages at the literal sense where sin is embodied - highlighting the misplaced values of worldliness - and where sin is habitual and instinctive after the fall.

At a figurative level, the anthropomorphised animal world of the *Fables* reflects worldly men who *seem* learned yet can never pass into the condition of God being in part animal. It

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<sup>352</sup> Fox, *op cit.*, 1962, p. 341.

compares sinful men to irrational beasts, a commonplace whose biblical authority offers a model of the fall and an obvious method of Christian debate.<sup>353</sup> Consequently, morality in a fallen world finds as its focus the bestiality of men who are, as Henryson puts it, 'like to beistis in condition.'<sup>354</sup>

If we understand creation as a fallen one in the conventional sense of an absolute fall there may be inconsistencies in the way the animal may be read as a sign. The paradox is that in the first instance animals are used as moral exemplars despite man's constant distancing of himself from the most obvious evidence of his fall - his bestial animality. But a second problem is that a fallen creation may not still be thought to speak of its maker: how could the animal, imperfect as a sign though it may be, signify something from which it is irretrievably separate, and which has no opportunity to gain salvation from the results of man's, rather than its own, disobedience? Do we view fallen creation as literally true, or from the premise of an allegorically persuasive narrative of man's state in relation to an all-creative God? The answer is a typically medieval 'either or both'. In aiming to clarify how animals may, as part of a 'fallen' creation, present the best possible harmonious sign and useful method of Christian debate it is necessary to observe Augustine's spiritual as absolute, and his temporal as contingent distinction. For Augustine the literal level of scripture is writing of 'outstanding authority' and absolute truth. If the theological line of truth is literal, though, he also stresses that we must be witness by our own knowledge to things within our range of senses, but which signify things out of the reach of these senses. For Augustine the mental process of reason constitutes a second level of understanding where the arbitrary signs of the temporal involve interpretation.<sup>355</sup> While Genesis as a literal sense scriptural text presents the fall as an all-inclusive one, Aquinas' view of man's corporeal context is contingent upon a specific definition of man's interrelationship with creation, a relationship based on the idea of man as a microcosm of God who speaks him

<sup>353</sup> Cf., 2 peter 2. 12, '*Hi vero velut irrationabilia pecora naturaliter in captionem et in perniciem in his quae ignorant blasphemantes, in corruptione sua peribunt*', and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Chaucer's translation) IV. 3 'syn he may not passe into the condicioun of God, he is turned into a beeste' and III. 8, man is a 'thyng that is right foul and brutyl (that is to syn, seruant to thi body). Jamieson, *op cit.*, pp. 36 - 38.

<sup>354</sup> John MacQueen sees these lines as the reaction of 'incorruptibility to the corruptible which became so in consequence of the fall of Adam, but still retains something of its original appearance. God made man in his own image; fallen man retains the likeness, but has much of the nature of beasts.' MacQueen, John, *Robert Henryson: A Study Of The Major Narrative Poems* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1967) pp. 199 - 120.

<sup>355</sup> DCD 11. 3.

into being. In this sense, man contains *all* the cosmos within himself, and within him alone all creation is fallen. By this premise, animals can be seen as separate from this fall, retaining meaning as signs in a way that only the unfallen could.

### 3. 4 (a) Do the *Fables* conform to a traditional view of creation as fallen?

There seems little doubt that the fall narrative can be seen as an explanation of what medieval thought already knew from experience: that it did not inhabit a paradise free from suffering and death and that man's habitually animal appetite is analogous to his fallenness:

Na meruell is, ane man be lyke ane beist,  
 Quhilk lufis ay carnall and foull delyte  
 That schame can not him re3ne nor arreist,  
 Bot takis all the lust and appetyte  
 Quhilk throw custom and the daylie ryte  
 Syne in the mynd sa fast is redicate  
 That he in brutal beist is transformate.

(Prologue, 50 - 56)

The 'brutal beistis' which speak and reason in the fictional world of the fables are *not* the same as the 'brutal beistis' into which men are transformed by habitual carnal acts, and Henryson urges the reader to keep two separate concepts of the beast clearly in mind. The distinction between the beast and the human behaving bestially operates at a moral or tropological level, where the beast does not share in the Christian plan of redemption and can follow its animal nature: with no 'soul' there is no ontological judgment or punishment. Despite the incorruptibility of his soul man's fallen state and corresponding comparison to animals expresses a regrettable, even uncomfortable, understanding of the necessity of a corporeal body yet a subjection to that bodies' 'lust and appetyte'. The prologue defines the soul in basically Aristotelian terms where it is infused into the corrupted 'carnall and foull' body upon whose biological conditions it is dependent for its existence. To illustrate this

soul / body dichotomy Henryson uses animals because, while talking animals bear little relation to reality, the body into which the soul is infused, though not in God's image, is of a carnality equal to that of mankind.

In 'The Paddock and the Mouse', a mouse who desires to cross a river for better food, asks a toad to ferry her. The mouse requires the toad to take an oath that she will provide safe passage. As the Toad tries to drown the mouse, a kite grabs them both and disembowels them. The fable typifies the interrelationship between man and his fallen animality. For Augustine, soul 'rejoiced' after the fall in its freedom to act 'perversely' and so 'was deprived of the obedient service which its body had at first rendered. ... This then was the time when the flesh began to "lust in opposition to the spirit", which is the conflict that attends us from our birth.'<sup>356</sup> In this way, the discussion by the river represents the instantaneous opposition of the soul to body at their joint conception because the desire of the body has become an obstacle to the reasoning of the soul, and ultimately therefore, to salvation. The soul is created as it is infused into the material, and must necessarily be united to the fallen body for the operation of sense perception. This is clear in the fable, in that while simultaneously incorruptible and not subject or relevant to time, the mouse is also bound within its body: 'suld I be bund and fast quhair I am fre / In howp of help?' ('Paddock', 2861 - 2) which can be paraphrased: why should I be infused into a body and subject to time when at the moment time has no authority over me - yet I can in no other way obtain salvation?<sup>357</sup> While the fables generally require that the reader work to establish the moral values of the tales, they do not generally extend to such complex allegorical exposition as we see here. This may be attributed to the fact that 'The Paddock and the Mouse' is the final of the fables. Certainly Henryson seems to encourage the reader to reflect not merely on the practical connotations that the tale has for their lifestyle, but to shock them into seeing the anagogic implications, and a divine perspective – or in fact judgment. Thus, obtaining recovery from the conditions of a material body shifts the fable's focus from one of moral *sententia* to the more pressing concern of spiritual salvation.

<sup>356</sup> DCD 19. 15.

<sup>357</sup> For a discussion see MacQueen, *op cit.*, p. 199.

The understanding here is that creation is a fallen materiality into which souls are infused. In fact, infusing 'human' souls into the animals of the text becomes an illustration of the duality of man's theological definition, as well as a profound expression of discomfort with the animality of humanity. 'Paddocks' or toads displaying apparent signs of fallenness, webbed feet and an ugly appearance, are difficult to read. The mouse asks how the toad can cross the river so easily: 'I haif mervell,' than quod the lytill mous, / 'how can thou fleit without fedder or fin?' ('Paddock', 2805 - 6). The toad stresses its adeptness when in its element, having 'twa feit,' quod scho, 'lukkin and braid' ('Paddock', 2812). Its webbed feet and physiognomy (the mouse's physiognomic lore proves more reliable than scripture in the fable) are a sign of its and man's fallenness and signify the deceptive nature of the corporeal and the danger of being misled by 'false appearances and delusory signs.'<sup>358</sup> The mouse has no certain means of discerning whether the impression she forms from the toad's outward appearance is accurate in a world where the appearance and significance of the animal belies reality, thereby pre-figuring the warning of the *moralitas* not to judge by superficial criteria. Signs are contingent when in a corporeal context 'defined and constrained by circumstance, including the spatial and temporal "frames" within which they take place.'<sup>359</sup> Henryson's statement that the *Fables* 'repreif the of thi misleuing, / O man, by figure of ane vther thing' (Prologue, 6 - 7) therefore suggests a reproof of man's animal sins exemplified by the fallenness of the toad and mouse. However, in a text that highlights the arbitrariness of a temporal context we might ask how the fallen can present *any* significance?

### 3. 4 (b) Augustine's understanding of the fall

Augustine's view that the fallen state of humanity in principle affects the whole of the created world is clearly illustrated in Henryson's world of the wolf and the lamb. A wolf and a lamb drink from the same stream, to which the wolf takes exception. The Lamb defends itself with scripture and legal terminology, but despite its reasoning is slaughtered by the wolf. As arbitrary and dualistic as the lamb's legal rhetoric may be it offers the wolf a

<sup>358</sup> McGinley *op cit.*, p. 249 ff.

<sup>359</sup> McGinley, *ibid.*, p. 249.

choice – prefiguring the divine judgement cited by the lamb. The lamb's question 'Haiff 3e not hard quhat Halie scripture sayis / Endytit with the mouth off God almycht?' is set against the wolf's nihilistic 'hellis fyre' and his very fallenness ('The Wolf and the Lamb' 2665 - 7).

A world in which one species has, for its survival, to prey upon and destroy another is not one that we might expect an omnibenevolent God to create. In Eden, man had no need of animals. With the fall, however, the relationship changes.<sup>360</sup> By his disobedience man forfeited his easy dominance over other species and began to eat them, Adam and Eve lost immortality, became subject to pain and death, and became aware of their sexuality. Consequently, all humanity, who were all in a way contained within Adam, would carry the burden of the fall. 'Every man is his own Adam' (Rom. 5. 12) was a compelling idea to a society who saw themselves as 'a moral mess, weak of will and prone to lust, envy, greed and every sort of unkind and anti-social behaviour.'<sup>361</sup> Man's chosen free-will, in other words, involved him in choices of good and evil. The definitive response comes from Augustine, who asserts that God cannot have produced evil. Evil, rather, is a choice, a free 'turning-away' from God, and not an entity in its own right. As 'all good is from God ... hence there is no nature which is not from God ... there is no nature which we admit is sin.'<sup>362</sup> For Augustine this turning away involves man's indulgence in his animal nature.

In *City Of God* Augustine states that the result of man's disobedience is an uncontrollable lust evident in the carnal nature of sexual activity. In Eden man's genitals were servants of his mind and obedient to his will. Anger and lust were not part of man's healthy state and intercourse did not involve the involuntarily excitement of instinctive lust. If he wanted to procreate, he could do it with the same control as he could sow seeds in the ground, a faculty lost with the fall. Sex becomes an uncontrollable activity, the intensity of sexual climax involving the extinction of mental awareness.<sup>363</sup> With the Fall Adam rose up to escape

<sup>360</sup> Cf., *maledicta terra in opere tuo; in laboribus comedes ex ea cunctis diebus vitae tuae* (Gen. 3. 17).

<sup>361</sup> H. J. Lynch., *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (London: Longman Publishing, 1998) pp. 262 - 3.

<sup>362</sup> Augustine, 'On the Relation of God and Evil.' From *de libero arbitrio*, Trans. by McGrath, *op cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>363</sup> 'So intense is the pleasure that when it reaches its climax there is an almost total extinction of mental alertness; the intellectual sentries, as it were, are overwhelmed ... surely such a man would prefer, if possible, to beget children without lust of this kind. For then the parts created for this task would be the servants of the his mind, even in their function of procreation, just as the other members are its servants in the various tasks to which they are assigned. They would begin their activity at the bidding of the will, instead of being stirred up by the ferment of lust.' Augustine, *City Of God*, *op cit.*, 14: 16., p. 577.

God's will in favour of his own, ignoring the fact that the existence of his own will depended entirely upon the will of God. His punishment is loss of control over his body: 'The arrogance of sex is the punishment and consequence of the arrogance of man. His uncontrolled sex is exactly the same as what he himself has been towards God - a rebel.'<sup>364</sup> In this same way the wolf's rejection of the lamb's reasoning, despite his understanding it, constitutes a rebellion against cited scripture and the abandonment of moral choice to his angry nature and the dominant and instinctive blood lust of his animal type. His final remark to the lamb is that this is just the way of things in *this* world: 'Ha,' quod the volff, 'thou wald intruse ressoun / Quhair wrang and reif suld duell in propertie' ('Wolf', 2693 - 4), demonstrating that reason has no place in his nature, illustrated in the graphic description of the murder of the Lamb:

The selie lamb culd do nathing bot bleit;  
 Sone wes he deid: the Wolff wald do na grace,  
 Syne drank his blude, and off his flesche can eit,  
 Quhill he wes full,  
 ('The Wolf and the Lamb', 2700 - 2704).

The sacrifice of the lamb presents an inversion of the Eucharist where the emphasis placed on the drinking of his blood constitutes an act that strengthens the wolf's animal rather than spiritual tendencies. The lamb and his scripture, representing Christ as the Word made flesh from the mouth of God, or 'Endytit with the mouth off God almycht?' ('Wolf', 2666), is to be partaken of by mankind in redemptive sacrifice. But the wolf, as the fallen word and the fallen flesh, suggests a profoundly pessimistic view of human nature. Haijo Westra's study of the speech of animals in the *Ysengrimus* observes the first method of cunning to be the serpent's use of language as a verbal trap. This bifurcation of speech and the dualistic thought that it represents is unmistakable in this scenario where the wolf is thinking about flesh rather than his soul. The lamb's legal pleading is met with the wolf's response, 'Be Goddis woundis, fals, tratour, thow sall de' ('Wolf', 2697), his language revealing his character precisely because the wolf cannot answer scripture, represented by 'what is probably the most intensely physical metaphor for deceitful language ... that of voracious

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<sup>364</sup> Carrette *op cit.*, pp. 185 - 6.



devouring.<sup>365</sup> Eating his enemy to gain its virtue, he does this in remembrance of the lamb's father, visiting the sins of the father upon the son. In what can be termed typological hatred he destroys the body of Christ. The wolf destroys because he hates. Moreover, feeding upon itself, hatred is the ultimate cannibal that consumes its own body, or in this case, destroys its own salvation. He rejects the Word but devours the flesh, the irony being that what he eats are in effect his own words.

The world of the wolf and the lamb is one where all animals, including the men that they represent, are fallen, manifested in instinctive and habitual bestiality and lust. While moral failure in humans was not theologically excusable, moral failure in animals was excusable because it did not involve moral agency. But Henryson's anthropomorphised wolf is given personal choice, which is negated by the characteristic instinct to kill, in line with his type, therefore typifying the habitual lusts of the corporeal, bestial, and habitual man.

Consequently Henryson's use of animals as exemplars of the dangers of sin suggests a deep concern to turn the audience - directly identified as men of law, nobles, and 'mychtie men' ('Wolf', 2729) in 'The Wolf and the Lamb' - from their 'bestly' ways to behaviour which would be best for the soul. During his lifetime Augustine persuaded the majority of Christians that sexual desire and death are 'unnatural' like the essentially unnatural acts of a wolf whose lustful will contradicts his moral agency but not his animality. Augustine insists that it is through an act of will that Adam and Eve '*did* change the structure of the universe; that their single wilful act permanently corrupted human nature as well as nature in general.'<sup>366</sup> This requires and affirms a belief in the free-will of the creatures whom it regards as responsible for rebelling against the creator and disrupting the harmony which was His meaningful, intended creation. It both affirms God as creator and repudiates that creation is a retrievable sign. So we might ask again, if the fable signifies what is best for the soul how does it do so, given that we cannot trust the contingency of signs?

For Augustine the problem is how we learn or understand anything if creation is irretrievably fallen. His answer is the provision of divine illumination: while the teacher can

<sup>365</sup> See Haijo. J. Westra, 'The Speech of Animals in the *Ysengrimus* and the Subversion of a Christian Hierarchy of Discourse', in *Reinardus: Yearbook of the International Reynard Society for the Study of the Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau*, ed. by Brian Levy & Paul Wackers, Vol. 2., (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Co., 1989) pp. 195 - 206.

<sup>366</sup> Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) p. 137.

never actually teach anything, they may assist the pupil to see truth not by didactic narratives but by dialectic involving choices facilitated by a fortunate fall. In this way Henryson does not take sides in the narrative of the wolf and lamb fable; rather, he supports the tale with a balance of seemingly incontestable Scriptural arguments suggesting human moral choice by each individual listener or reader. In the same sense the only true teacher for Augustine is the *logos* or 'inner word' that sets standards and mediates human choices of assent and dissent:

One who hears me likewise sees those things with an inner and undivided eye, he knows the matter of which I speak by his own contemplation, not by means of words. Hence, I do not teach even such a one although I speak what is true and he sees what is true. For he is taught not by words, but by the realities themselves made manifest to him by God revealing them to his inner self.<sup>367</sup>

The soul is seen as the recipient of divine truth whether this is by experience of the 'real' by *sciencia* or knowledge through the senses: or in the abstraction of words which would enable *sapientia* or wisdom from the contemplation of eternal reality. The student must employ reasonable discrimination to perceive arbitrary and attenuant words and signs while inwardly he comes to understand by internal truth, illuminated by the grace of God.<sup>368</sup>

Like the problem of knowing in 'The Paddock and the Mouse' meaning may not immediately be distinguished by signs which draw attention to their very fallenness but in correlatives between prologue, fable and, *moralitas*. Repeating the imagery of the prologue, the 'hard nuttis' of the corporeal and the promised 'feist' of the spiritual ('Paddock', 2796 - 7) present the far riverbank as symbolic trope and seemingly uncomplicated cliché representing heaven and spiritual reward. But the difficulty in reaching it and its meaning by the audience - and the mouse - may only ever be attainable by a literary expression which represents what man already knows. Literary symbolism, in other words, presents arbitrary

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<sup>367</sup> *DMa* 40, *cf.*, the Augustinian background to Hugh of Saint-Victor's words 'the idea in the mind is the internal word, which is shown forth by the sound of the voice, that, by the internal word. And the divine wisdom, which the father has uttered out of his heart, invisible in Itself, is recognised through creatures and in them.' *Didascalicon*, *op cit.*, V. iii.

<sup>368</sup> For a useful discussion in full on this understanding and its uses see Åke Bergvall, *The "Enabling of Judgement": Sir Philip Sidney and the Education of the Reader*, PhD thesis at the University of Uppsala 1989, (Sweden: Uppsala, 1989) p. 84.

signs of arbitrary things for decisive interpretation which may be understood *if* the audience has faith and is granted the divine grace to understand its meaning.<sup>369</sup>

### 3. 4 (c) The Scholastic rejection: the argument from design

To medieval thought Genesis presented an innocence which was unimaginable, but which seemed evident in the harmony of natural signs. Brian Murdoch has observed that a fallen mankind cannot conceive of what is it to be naked yet unashamed, leading to what he calls logical impasses for both theological and secular literary writers.<sup>370</sup> These ‘logical impasses’, most evident in Augustine’s sign theory, seem to resolve themselves with Aquinas’ ‘rejection’ of the idea of a complete fall in favour of seeing animals as allegorically persuasive signs of a benevolent God. In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas explains that in the state of innocence Adam had no mastership over animals, and that the nature of animals was not changed by man’s fall, in the understanding that an all-encompassing fall of creation would problematise semiotics. There would be no direct line from present reality to interpreting God. Aquinas asserts the essential goodness of creation and the value of each kind of creature in itself. This, Aquinas explains, is signified by the fact that God led the animals to man, that he might give them names expressive of their respective natures: ‘*Quod significatum est per hoc quod Deus ad eum animalia adduxit, ut eis nomina imponeret, quae eorum naturas designant.*’<sup>371</sup> Creation is essentially good (Gen 1. 21). If providentially indeterminate, animals would be an empty sign for Aquinas because they would no longer maintain the purpose of their design, no longer offer the ‘experimental knowledge’ provided by the essential determination of each animal nature, existing as it does to inform its highest quidditative definition, man. Aquinas explains that in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection: ‘*Sicut enim in generatione*

<sup>369</sup> In this sense the interpretation of the *Fables* by labour and ‘grit diligence’ (Prologue, 9) lies within the frame of a private experience whose content cannot be transmitted or communicated to other individuals, leaving the particular individual forever bound inside a nutshell of incommunicable experience. This is a classic example of a medieval inversion of the function and use of the universal. Value is not placed on universals for Augustine, because they cannot exist in a fallen world. Knowing, rather, is an interior activity, truth being contained within the individual *logos*.

<sup>370</sup> Murdoch, *op cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>371</sup> *ST Q 91, 1, ad 3.*

*rerum intelligitur quidam ordo quo proceditur de imperfecto ad perfectum*'.<sup>372</sup> In this way he sees the essential purpose of the animal as informing that which is rationally above it: 'If then nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all of them for the sake of man.'<sup>373</sup> The proper end of animals is to nourish man's knowledge of creation.<sup>374</sup> Aquinas' statement that in the state of innocence, before man had disobeyed, nothing disobeyed him that was naturally subject to him highlights the exemplary relationship for which animals were designed, and while the nature of animals was not changed by man's sin, '*Non enim per peccatum hominis natura animalium est mutata*',<sup>375</sup> and for his disobedience to God man was punished by the disobedience of the animals: '*inobedientia ad hominem eorum quae ei debent eius, eo quod ipse fuit inobediens Deo*'.<sup>376</sup> So while in innocence man had no 'bodily' need of animals for clothes or as food he needed experimental knowledge of their natures. In what seem closer to fable animals, who were designed as illustrative exemplars, the animals of Genesis present themselves to man to be named - though not to be eaten (Gen. 1. 19, 2. 18).<sup>377</sup>

Reading the *Fables* from the premise of intended design would involve seeing each animal as conforming with its original design, with types such as a 'fen3eit' fox and '[A]ne cruell volff' whose characteristics must be the God-given ones from which man would learn. Though not 'al grunded vpon truth' the further attribution of human characteristics to the fable animals presents a mirror to man by the figural relationship maintained between animal and human which, by Aquinas' argument, would be God's continuing intention. The paradox of this is that animals are nominally defined by what man *says* they are, in Aquinas' terms the names Adam gives animals being expressive of their respective natures. The wolf's characteristics are his 'wickitnes' ('Wolf', 2624) and cruelty, his accusations and actions 'contrair ... to ressoun'. ('Wolf', 2644) But he is both what he always was, full of

<sup>372</sup> ST Q 96, 1, res.

<sup>373</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. by T. A. Sinclair (London: Penguin, 1981) I. iii, 1256 b, pp. 78 - 79.

<sup>374</sup> 'For a creature's shaping and conditioning indicate that it *comes from* some-where; its specific form indicates its makers *word* as a house's shape indicates its architects idea; and its functional order indicates its maker's *love* as a house's uses indicate what its architect willed.' ST 1991, Q 93. 6.

<sup>375</sup> ST Q 96, 1, ad 2.

<sup>376</sup> ST Q 96, 1, res.

<sup>377</sup> For Aquinas human ascendancy is subject to a divine plan in which each animal in particular is designed to serve a purpose. In Eden this was to inform man about his creator: '*et sic etiam homo in statu innocentiae dominabatur plantis et rebus inanimatis, non per imperium vel immutationem, sed absque impedimento utendo eorum auxilio*', in the state of innocence man's mastership over plants and inanimate things consisted not in commanding or in changing them, but in making use of them without hindrance. (ST part 1, Q 96. 2).

‘violens’, ‘craft’ and sutelte’ (‘Wolf’, 2713) as well as types of men, ‘fals extortioneris’ (‘Wolf’, 2711) in the text. He is what God his author made him and what Henryson his author makes him. These types are unchanging: ‘[T]he volfis thocht wes all on wickitnes; / The selie lamb wes meik and innocent’ (‘Wolf’, 2624 - 5).<sup>378</sup> Man in his turn is defined by animal types whose designated attributes are universal ones. There could be no universals in a fallen world, and without universals knowledge is impossible. Thus, Aquinas’ argument from design allows the universal characteristics of types, not of individuals, to constitute knowable signs where the identity of its type is also its value. The animal is both a universal and a lesson remaining consistent and unchanged from the original design of the creator, who also designed a fundamental similarity between animals and man so that he could learn from the very ‘meaning’ of each animal.<sup>379</sup>

While the morals of the *Fables* are ones configured in speaking animals, there is also a sense in which literal things are more dependable than words, and types of men and animal more universally knowable: ‘3yt neuertheles we may haif knowlegeing / Off God almychtie be his creatouris’ (‘Preaching’ 1650 - 1651). MacQueen sees this as Thomastic thought,<sup>380</sup> God’s wisdom being proved by the harmony of his material creation. His fairness is proved by the beauty of a creation including man made in God’s image, and His benign nature proved by his subjection of creation to man’s use (*bonitas utilitas*) or in Henryson’s terms ‘All creature he maid for the behufe / Off man, and to his supportation’ (‘Preaching’ 1671 - 1672). Animals still retain their ‘meaning’ as a transcript of divine goodness, and while innocent victims of man’s sin, man is innocent of parasitism because they were designed for his ‘use’.

What Aquinas’ distinction highlights is that if animals *were* fallen, they would no longer fulfil their purpose as meaningful Sign being instead a contingent - if useful - sign. Indeed, reading a fallen creation in terms of morality would be highly suspect at best, for the laws of nature operative in this *fallen* world would not correspond to the will of God, and the

<sup>378</sup> At a lexical level Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ description of the wolf is characterised in this way. What the wolf treads on does not live. He is ‘a raueyn beste and desireth and coueyteþ blood’ and ‘a greet glutoun and deuouereþ moche.’ But he is also associated with sexual desires, the hairs in his tail acting as an aphrodisiac in men. For the wolf, though, this desire takes a specific form. He ‘deceyuen scheep more wiþ gyle and wrenches þan wiþ might and strength’ because, as Aristotle says ‘al þe kynde of wolves is contrary and adversary to al þe kynde of schep.’ *DPR* 18. 71.

<sup>379</sup> Scripturally underpinned by ‘*Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur, sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas, ita ut sint inexcusabiles*’ (Rom. 1. 20).

<sup>380</sup> MacQueen, *op cit.*, p. 59.

Christian reader of creation could *not* assume creation as a textbook for moral reference because it would be morally imperfect. As God's intention was to create all things good animals must be objects of value for man's knowledge and a signifier for their creator, continuing to exist with His approval, which they do meaningfully to demonstrate His benevolence of intention toward man. The design premise, in other words, must encompass the fall as a means to an unchanging providential end within which animals have inherent value.

### 3. 4 (d) The microcosm - macrocosm relationship

As observed above, Bartholomaeus Anglicus sees man as a microcosm akin to the sphere of elements which is the world. There are three levels of how we may read this world. Firstly, God is understood in the world that He made: 'as Boys [Boethius] seiþ: þow bringest forþ alle þinge of hey ensample, þow fairest: berest in þi mynde þe fairest worlde and makest and worchist by a lik ymage.' The second world is the world as it is made up of the things of the cosmos, or the elements: 'as heuen in þe whiche þe sterre[s] schineþ, and fyre þat hetip al þinge, ayer by þe whiche alle þing þat haþ lif breþeþ and þryueþ, watir þat biclippeþ þe sides of þerþe, erthe þat susteyneþ and holdeþ vp and fedip al þis lowe þinges.' The third world is man himself within that universe: 'for he schewip in himself likeness of al þe worlde ... þe thridde worlde is somdel euerlastinge and somdel passing, beringe in hitself licness of all þinges',<sup>381</sup>

This understanding would seem to support the idea that animals present potentially unfallen signs, stating as it does that man is a microcosm of macrocosmic correspondences. It is in this context that Aquinas does not question that there *was* a fall, but sees man alone as fallen in this sense: '*Dicendum quod in homine quodammodo sunt omnia; et ideo secundum modum quo dominatur his quae in seipso sunt, secundum hunc modum competit ei dominari aliis*' [Man in sense contains all things, and accordingly is master of what is within himself.

<sup>381</sup> DPR, *op cit.*, 8:1. Seymour in his commentary on *De proprietatibus rerum* observes the relationship with 'the Hermetic idea of man as microcosm, expressed for example in the *Asclepius* ... restated by Bernard Silvestrus, *De mundi universitate*, in Seymour 1992 *op cit.*, p. 97.

In this way he can have mastership over all things].<sup>382</sup> The view that the cosmological change is *within* man as a microcosm of creation primarily involves the understanding that God speaks man into being: ‘*Et ait: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*’ (Gen. 1.26). Henryson understands that God both creates and contains all, speaking man into being in similitude to Himself, who in turn contains all things within himself:

And mannis saull is febill and ouer small,  
Off vnderstanding waik and vnperfite  
To comprehend him that contenis all  
(‘Preaching’ 1644 - 1646).

But this trinity may not truly be understood, as Henryson observes in ‘The Preaching’: ‘Nane suld presume be ressoun naturall / to seirche the secreitis off the Trinitie’ (1648-9). Rather, man should have faith, let reason be, and gain knowledge of God’s gracious mind from ‘his creatouris’ (‘Preaching’, 1651).

In this sense it is the macrocosm-microcosm relationship that makes the *Fables* a specifically Christian text. In the first world God is known by and in the things he has made: Henryson’s toad ‘is mannis bodie’ in his corporeal context (‘Paddock’, 2937). As in Bartholomaeus’ understanding of the microcosm, the toad comes to represent the corporeal world of which she is made, ‘inconstant, fals, and wariand’ (‘Paddock’, 2847 - 2850).<sup>383</sup> But the toad is cognate with Bartholomaeus’ man as third world or microcosm of the cosmos, bearing as he does all things within himself ‘saull and bodye’ dwelling in the ‘flude’ of the corporeal (‘Paddock’, 2958). In this sense the figurative comparison of man’s body with the toad’s allows an understanding of ‘þe vnseye þingis of God beþ iseye and iknowe by þingis þat beþ imade and vnderstonde’ (DPR 8. 1).

If the toad is the world how do we read it, especially as we are told that people are not to be judged by external appearance?

<sup>382</sup> STQ 96, 2, res.

<sup>383</sup> The allegorisation of the toad as the world has as its authoritative source Odo of Cheriton’s statement ‘*mundus similis est Rane, que blandiendo muri promisit*’ cited by Jamieson, *op cit.*, p. 59.

Off sum the face may be full flurischand,  
 Off silkin toung and cheir rycht amorous,  
 With mynd inconstant, fals, and wariand,  
 Full off desait and menis cautelous.

(‘Paddock’, 2847 - 2850)

The mouse, of course, is right to be sceptical about the paddock’s appearance, ultimately being easily deceived by the ‘silkin toung’ because ‘as a temporal fallen creature, man is subject to illusion.’<sup>384</sup> The mouse’s pact with the toad continues the consistent imagery of being tied to and drowned by the material: ‘suld I be bund and fast, quhar I am fre, / In hoip of help’ (‘Paddock’, 2861 - 2). Jamieson goes as far as interpreting the water as the world of sin into which man is immersed<sup>385</sup> and the paddock ‘is mannis bodie’ (‘Paddock’, 2937) swimming in the world of the sea ‘Ay in perrell, and reddie for to droun.’ (‘Paddock’, 2940) Desire for the material, as exemplified by animals and animal desires offer no salvation: ‘of all carnall lust be the suggestioun, / Quhilk draws ay the saull and duggis down’ (‘Paddock’, 2953 - 4).

These multiple levels of interpretation, coupled with the idea of man as microcosm, suggests that creation *is* fallen but it is in the specific sense of being fallen within man, whose spiritual fall and free will are solely responsible for his condition. The patently illusory presentation of animal as man in the *Fables* indicates the exemplary nature of animals as lessons about man’s fallenness in the corporeal. But as signs, animals retain their integral design in correspondence with the original Will of the creator, and as signs they cannot be morally or spiritually fallen. Thus, to ask whether creation is fallen, Scholastic thought returns the question, what exactly *is* creation? And it finds as its answer that while man has the ability to transcend by virtue of his reason,<sup>386</sup> like God he has a creation within himself which fell by his own free-will. ‘If nature is fallen, then there is no straightforward line to be

<sup>384</sup> MacQueen, *op cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>385</sup> Jamieson, *op cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>386</sup> ‘Things in general resemble God in existing, some things also in being alive, and some finally in intellectual discernment: the closest likeness to God in creation. Properly speaking then, only creatures with intellect are made in God’s image.’ *ST* trans. by T. McDermott *op cit.*, Q 93 art 2., p. 144.



drawn from present reality to the purpose of God',<sup>387</sup> the signs no longer signifying his purpose: '3yt neuertheles we may haif knowlegeing / Off God almychtie be his creatouris, / That he is gude, fair, wyis, and bening' ('Preaching' 1650 -1653). Everything that exists must do so in a continuing relationship with the Creator to which it belongs.

### 3. 4 (e) Summary

Understanding the synthesis of the fable form via the concept of fallenness opens Henryson's *Fables* to certain readings. The revision of Augustine's semiotics of the fall, and interpretative approaches to creation as a sign for its creator by Aquinas demonstrates an anxiety about the way animals and man's relationship to them, are read. It is significant that animals in particular are the focus of this revision; where man's fall is of cosmological significance the understanding that this is contingent, indeed contained within man, allows the animal to be read as a coherent sign. Ultimately, of course, the animals of Henryson's *Fables* are nothing more than the mobilisation of a set of rhetorical devices, or in his own words 'Fein3eit fabilis' which 'Ane sillogisme propone.' (Prologue, 1, 3, 46) As such, these rhetorical animals inhabit many borders; of imaginative art where the actual animal is irrelevant compared to its potential symbolic counterpart, as well as the borders of the human, and the rational. At the indistinct limits of doctrinal thought, too, the animal finds its habitat, serving to express in a practical context what the 'official' texts of Augustine and Aquinas may not. It is something that Henryson does well, showing the animal in which his audience will find themselves, yet urging them that the humanity of their animality, as distinct from the beast of the literal, is a far more deadly beast involving as it does their fallenness and subsequent personal choice. Of course, the significance is in reality lost on the animal, who has no moral agency and who exists without such concerns, fulfilling alone the will of its creator. At the literal level it would seem a necessity that if a straightforward line is to be drawn from present reality to God's purpose they did not fall.

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<sup>387</sup> Lloyd, A., 'The Fall' in *A Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. by P. B. Clark & Andrew Linzey (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 370.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## MAN AS ANIMAL

**4. 1 The doctrinal commonplace in Middle English romances**

There are a plethora of Middle English romances which engage with the animal nature of mankind, and explore the notion that he should aspire to transcend the transgressive desires of the animal body which he inhabits. This fourth chapter continues to develop the premise that the animal is devalued and displaced, by showing how man's natural animality – the conditions of his corporeal existence on earth – is seen as a potential barrier to salvation, though one which may be successfully outsmarted by reason and faith. In this context, the abatement and distancing of the animal side of man's nature, entails the distancing of all animality from human consideration. Fictional texts attempt to rationalise the relation between human soul and animal body, with a marked depreciation of animality which is inevitably influenced by doctrinal thought. My focus on two romances from this period, which explore the idea that man is primarily or partly animal, provides material which is available to be read in such a way. *Sir Gowther* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* illustrate that the displacement of the animal in doctrinal discourse gives way to discussion in the fictive text, where Sharp boundaries become inadequate, and where man's theoretical partition from the animal becomes a matter of considerable complexity, and often, undecidability.

*Sir Gowther* addresses the problem of the identity of a man whose human nature is compromised by his half demonic parentage. Triggered by his mother's desire to

produce a child, the natural, pre-social or primal instinct comes into play resulting in the birth of a subject who is instinctively alienated from, and anarchistic toward, the norms of Christian society and the courtly aspiration to devout purity. Like the fantastical men of Ethiopia and India, and Jews, he is not merely unchristian but anti-Christian, and until shriven of his sin, bestial at best. Indeed, in this romance the animal and the natural are associated with the demonic father who is also a bestial man. As a symbolic animal, however, Gowther's penitential humility allows him to become a perfect Christian subject.

The text explores the doctrinal commonplace of man's duality and hybridity, the narrative progressing through Gowther's succession from being a bestial man, to penitent dog-man, to Saint.<sup>388</sup> David Salter's painstaking reading of *Sir Gowther* draws on biblical analogues and sacred biography to show how the animal motifs indicate that Gowther enjoys God's love and protection after his repentance:

... while it is quite possible that the poem draws on this generalised association between dogs on the one hand, and arduous toil and purgative suffering on the other, it should be noted that Gowther's experience of dogs is much more all-encompassing than that of Lazarus or Tobias. For unlike these two biblical figures, the extremely degrading nature of the penance that Gowther has to endure means that he actually comes close to losing his identity as a human being. Indeed, he can be said to have symbolically joined the ranks of the beast, such is his enforced intimacy with them.<sup>389</sup>

As Salter points out Gowther's experience is a totalising one, in the sense that the boundary between him and the dogs he encounters becomes blurred; there is an overt metaphoricity in his canine behaviour, but there is also a sense in which he moves

<sup>388</sup> The doctrinal commonplace of comparing man to animal, as discussed above in relation to Aristotle, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Henryson, Boethius (*CP* IV. 3; III. 8) and 2 Peter 2. 10; 2. Peter 2. 12.

<sup>389</sup> David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001) p. 78. In particular Salter discusses the penitential patterns, hagiographic elements and the resistance of the text to generic categorisation pp. 71 - 81. See also E. M. Bradstock, 'The penitential pattern in *Sir Gowther*' in *Parergon* 20 (April, 1978) pp. 3 - 11.

easily between the human and the animal. The symbolism of Gowther as a dog is accretive, in that though we come to see him as a dog such an image is dependent upon us seeing him concurrently as a man, thereby drawing attention to both the animal and the human sides of his personality. Such hybridity accretes meaning as his life progresses so that at each interpretative level of the text Gowther's life as a Christian subject is evaluated and defined against his animality; as a man he is an animal, defined quidditatively in relation to mankind as the highest definition of the genus. Mankind, having quiddity as an animal physiologically is also, in Aristotelian terms rational, and in Christian terms stood up to face God – the physiological manifestation of his reason. Thus is he defined in relation to his highest point of definition - that of his superior intellect, and his Christian soul.

In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* man's animal nature threatens to emerge if the integrity of chivalric virtue comes into question, highlighting the contradictions and inconstancies of a dominant social norm. The court of Arthur is being tested in such a way, that if it should fail convincingly to demonstrate that its courtesy is genuine and steadfast, the animal instincts which courtly ideals claim to transcend may be ignored, and individuals digress from their Christian spiritual aspirations. When animal 'others' are revealed to be the same as men, they are represented as anomalies who threaten the coherence of the system into which they must be integrated and absorbed, thus neutralising the threat of the animal.

#### 4. 1 (a) *Sir Gowther*: caninisation to canonisation

If God was seen as the divine author (*auctor*) of all texts (the primary efficient cause) and man merely the human scribe moved by him, God was also seen as the authoritative guarantor of the value of a particular text. David White raises interesting questions about the way in which the monstrous can be seen in literary texts, though it is noticeably a question which extends beyond the monstrous to the human and

animal. He suggests that we should interrogate the idea of the monster, 'which Isidore of Seville identified as monstrations (*monere*) or warnings (*monare*) of divine will. The question arises: Of what were monsters monstrations, and whom were they intended to warn?'<sup>390</sup> *Sir Gowther* (c.1480) is a Middle English romance about a man who, though fathered by a devil, passes through the process of living like a dog to become a saint.<sup>391</sup> It clearly warns its audience about the dangers of digressive behaviour, about how the animal side of man's being may become monstrous, and about the jeopardy involved with turning from the divine will. The tale is remarkable for its exploration of the supernatural conception of an anti-Christian child which might be difficult to elucidate at any level, were it not for constant textual allusions to the scriptural antecedents which underpin the narrative, and authorise its subject matter. A synopsis of the plot demonstrates that the wilful digression resulting in Gowther's procreation and birth as a beast-like man, must be countered by his reification as an animal, from which state he must rise to become a Christian subject. After ten years of marriage the duke of Austria ('Estryke' 31) and his wife have had no child. Despite their love for each other the duke tells her that they should part as he needs an heir to his lands. The duchess, in a state of extreme distress, prays for a child at whatever cost. A man whom she thinks is her husband has sex with her in an orchard outside the castle walls, but then reveals himself to be a hairy demon (a 'feltured fende' 71), tells her that she is pregnant, and foretells the fiery nature of the child. The duchess conceals the event from her husband and gives birth to the child, which is named Gowther. Gowther grows quickly and is strong and aggressive, killing his first man at an early age with a sword of his own making. After serial rape, murder and pillage, Gowther accepts that he must be of 'unnatural' birth and goes to Rome to be shriven of his sin. The pope hears his confession and gives him a penance – he must not speak, and must eat nothing unless it is from the mouths of dogs. Gowther leaves Rome and comes across the castle of an emperor where he resides in the hall,

<sup>390</sup> David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog – Man* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 1.

<sup>391</sup> Extant in two manuscripts both of which date from the late fifteenth century: 'A' Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19. 3. 1, and 'B' London British Library, Royal MS 17.B.43. All references to *Sir Gowther* will be to the edition by Maldwyn Mills which utilises both A and B texts. See Maldwyn Mills, ed., *Six Middle English Romances* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1992).

both in the centre of court life yet on its margins, speechless, and eating food only from the mouths of dogs. On behalf of the emperor he anonymously fights in - and wins - three battles against the Saracen. Finally, he is forgiven by God, becomes emperor, and after his death is canonised.

While romances such as *Sir Gowther* were criticised for being literally untrue, they were also understood to reveal fundamental truths and encourage an audience to follow a good life. Citing Thomasin von Zirclaere Stephen Jaeger observes that romances were often attacked because they were seen as lies which contained fables,

Wan si bezeichnenunge hât  
der zuht unde der wârheit:  
daz wâr man mit lûge kleit.<sup>392</sup>

The acceptability of fiction is dependent, Thomasin explains, upon the fact that romance contains signs of good manners and representational lessons in courtesy which urge chivalric codes on the listener as a model to be imitated and aspired to: honest men clothe a higher truth in the 'lies' of the literal. The sensational if 'marginal' animal acts of *Sir Gowther* and their apparent non – meaning in relation to the central theme of penitence, finds explanation pedagogically if seen as the re-working of established texts and analogues which explore man's animal nature, and which is perfectly plausible when considered from the point of view that 'it is the mark of the poetic arts to indicate the truth of things by invented similitudes.'<sup>393</sup> These marginal acts are about the anxiety of nomination and the problem of signifying a fictional 'nothing' or lie, in order to give birth to a secondary or even

<sup>392</sup> Thomasin von Zirclaere (*welscher Gast* 124 - 26) Cited in Stephen C. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilising Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939 – 1210*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) p. 266.

<sup>393</sup> Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, VII, 6, 3., cited by Eco 1986 op cit., p. 60. Both scripture and poetic fiction are seen to transmit truths extending beyond the literal level, however incredible they may seem. Truth, for Aquinas, exists not merely in relation to the literary context but rather emerges from realising that its events indicate a higher or veiled truth. The 'corporeal' or actual reality, though imperfect and inferior, transmits the potential truth of the idea. Elsewhere Aquinas states: '*Dicendum quod conveniens est Sacrae Scripturae divina et spiritualia sub similitudine corporalium tradere*.' It is good, Aquinas tells us, to transmit the things of God and the spirit by means of corporeal similitudes. ST 1. Q 1, 9.

veiled thematic meaning which might be glossed *the defining of human Christian selves against the animal*. The marginalisation of the animal can be seen at a linguistic level where the language of the fiend at Gowther's conception in the orchard, 'Y have geyton a chlyde on the' (*Gow.* 73), generates meaning by its allusion to the scriptural immaculate conception '*Ecce concipies in utero, et paries filium, et vocabis nomen eius Iesum*' [And, behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and will call him Jesus] (*Luke.* 1. 31) and in turn, with Gowther's contrasting and spiritually empty, carnal acts: 'Meydyns' maryage wolde he spyll / And take wyffus ageyn hor wyll' (*Gow.* 93 - 94), where description becomes proverbial by expressing Gowther's notoriety through the allusive force of repeating the manner of his own conception. Reintroducing the 'orchard' images of desire and carnal acts by describing them as Gowther's acts, provides two versions of the same occurrence: a bestial copulation by *the* beast and his son, and the spiritually ideal predecessor which it imitates and denigrates. Within the form and genre of the romance these images are equal: but it is their position, as well as their place within the progression of the allegory, which gives them authority. Michael Camille usefully observes that the 'all-purpose utterance of proverbial expression is protean, as opposed to the fixity of written meaning. Just as the proverb has no single divine authority, but is spoken in response to specific situations, marginal imagery likewise lacks the oceanographic stability of religious narrative or icon.'<sup>394</sup> In this way, Gowther's marginal position in relation to Christian society is deliberately ambiguous, being defined in the text experientially, and solely in terms of Christian or unchristian actions.

While romances may be literally incredible, they are also figurative; they provide a site for the exploration of such doctrinal comparisons of man with natural brute beasts [*irrationabilia pecora naturaliter*]: man, like beast, may perish in his own corruption [*in corruptione sua peribunt*] (2 Peter 2. 12). Man, though aspiring to God, inhabits a material world and is a subject of animal status. The figurative and allegorical nature of the text defamiliarises such material, and recontextualises it as a fiction in which the

<sup>394</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1992) p. 36.

dislocations of the supernatural seem strange (*alienum*) highlighting parallel as well as linear readings, and whose strangeness also constitute clear signs. In this way Gowther as a metaphoric figure bears little relation to the 'real' at the literal level, but explores man's animalness through an everyman figure, who provides a solution to the animal state.

#### 4. 1 (b) Culpability of the womb and hybridity of the man

Primarily, Gowther's birth can be seen to be the result of the duchess's feminine transgression in praying for a child at whatever cost. This digression from the courtly, is defined in relation to chivalric norms. The poet - narrator stresses the importance of the tournament which is given to celebrate the marriage, and in which the duke distinguishes himself. In this way, the couple are established to be noble and pure, and their court to be a shining example of courtly ideals: 'The duke hymself wan stedys ten' (*Gow.* 43). Subsequently they live happily for ten years; but without the birth of a child the couple become unhappy. While it is clearly stated that he could not beget, nor she bear a child, the blame is ultimately attributed by the duke to the duchess's infertility:

He chylde non geyt ne sche non bare:

Ther joy began to tyne.

To is ladé sone con he seyn,

'Y tro thou be sum baryn,

Hit is good that we twyn;

Y do bot wast my tyme on the,

Eireles mon owre londys bee -'

For gretynge he cun not blyn.

Tho lade sykud and made yll chere,



That all feylyd hur whyte lere,  
 For schu conseyyd nocht,  
 Scho preyd to God and Maré mylde  
 Schuld gyffe hur grace to have a chylde,  
*On what maner scho ne roghth.*  
 In hur orchar, apon a day,  
 Ho meyt a mon, tho sothe to say,  
 That hur of luffe besoghth;  
 As lyke hur lorde as he myght be –  
 He leyd hur down undur a tre,  
 With hur is wyll he wroghth.

(Gow. 50 – 69, my emphasis)

Despite their love for each other, the intention to separate from his wife in favour of a fertile woman demonstrates the duke's striking pragmatism, motivated by his desire to have an heir to his lands. This pragmatism may ultimately make him culpable in that his suggestion that they separate instigates his wife's prayers for a child '*On what maner scho ne roghth.*' The 'ryche' (Gow. 47, 89) duke's prime concern is to secure possession of his estate, or 'londys' (Gow. 56), for his progeny in perpetuity, emphasising the value of the material over the spiritual, and generating the dramatic irony that his heir is not in fact his son. As will become clear, the duke's bid for material transcendence in this sense is not the approved bid for transcendence of the conclusion.

In her grief and panic, however, the duchess prays for a child at whatever cost (Gow. 63). This is clearly a deviation from the norms of expected behaviour for a Christian woman. The reckless prayer should be seen in relation to the conventions of other versions such as the comparable scenario in *Octavian*, where anxiety surrounding the Empress's inability to produce a child, '[n]ow have we sevyn yere togedur byn, / And we no chylde have us between', is allayed by an initial response presupposing that the circumstance is God's will; the empress suggests that lands and wealth should go in

perpetuity to the edification of God: 'A ryche abbey schall we make / For owre dere lady sake, ...'.<sup>395</sup> It is the impiety of praying for a child not naturally granted by God which leaves the duchess in *Gowther* vulnerable to being preyed-upon by the devil. In this sense a charge of moral obloquy may also be laid upon the duchess for invoking the 'fiend' or pagan Other-world lover who is also the 'devil' of Christian theology, resulting in the conception of an unmoral child.<sup>396</sup> Still at the literal level, though now perspectively focused on the personal actions and intentions of the duchess in her desire for a child, attention is focused on her as she turns away from the court to the natural and the consolation of an orchard.

The importance of the demonic events of the orchard lie in their direct association with the natural as both site of animal copulation and procreation, and as the natural realm which is outside of the boundaries of the duke's castle, and the courtly ideals for which it stands. The duchess meets with a man whom she thinks is her husband '[t]hat hur of luffe besoght' (*Gow.* 66). Within the boundaries of the courtly life of the castle the subject matter of the wife's failure to produce a child is discussed, while the process of copulation is taken outside to the natural where 'He leyd hur down undur a tre' in the orchard. In this context the orchard takes on a marginal position in relation to the confines of the courtly castle and its gaze. She has to go outside the castle boundaries and all that it stands for to conceive the child.<sup>397</sup> It is only with the realisation that she has had sex with a fiend that the duchess abandons the natural and

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<sup>395</sup> *Octavian*, in Mills, *op cit.*, 65 - 66, 76 - 77.

<sup>396</sup> In Celtic tales of this type the Wish - Child, or Wonder - Child, is produced by the 'mother's appeal for a child whether from God or the devil, and her promise to give the child to the devil if it should be born through his aid. The child thus born comes into the world already possessed of evil.' Laura Alandis Hibbard Loomis, *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclical Metrical Romances* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924) p. 52.

<sup>397</sup> M. B. Ogle's article on *Sir Gowther* attempts to bring meaning to the tale by suggesting that apocryphal books of the bible, where supernatural beings have intercourse with mortal women, are analogues which emphasise aspects of the immaculate conception story. Ogle also places importance on stories from the Middle Ages which emphasise the barrenness of the woman, her grief at childlessness, and her desire for a child. In these tales the supernatural being appears to her in a garden or orchard, and a child is usually conceived under a tree. See M. B. Ogle, "The Orchard Scene in *Tydorel* and *Sir Gowther*", in *Romantic Review* 13 (1922) p. 37. In contrast Laura Loomis attacks this line of argument when she states that 'it is difficult to see how the pious author of *Gowther* could ever have borrowed [from apocrypha] directly, as Ogle [p. 43] was inclined to think he did, since such a borrowing would involve equating the Angel with the devil and the blessed Virgin with the devil-born boy.' See Loomis, *op cit.*, p. 54. However, the equation and direct inversion of scripture which Loomis objects to is too allusory, and too explicit to be dismissed in this way.

takes defence in the castle: 'Into hur chambur fast ho wan, / That was so bygly byld' (Gow. 77 - 78) to encase herself again in the fortress of chastity, and courtly ideology.<sup>398</sup> The animal act of procreation, here sinful and allegorised as evil, or a turning away from God, is taken out the context of the court, to a natural if marginal one, beyond the boundary of acceptable courtly norms. The 'personal' perspective of the duchess' own will is also a social perspective where the original sin of not considering that her childless state may be God's will, results in far-reaching consequences for the Austrian subjects of the duke. While unlike Eve, she has picked no forbidden fruit, by her free-will has she has 'fallen' from the court and all it stands for, thereby continuing the post-lapsarian digression toward the animal.

There is a long tradition of nature as itself female, though in Gowther nature is clearly embodied by the masculine figure of the wild-man or fiend.<sup>399</sup> Set aside the warnings against supernatural creatures in the *DPR*, the duchess's excursion into the orchard can

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<sup>398</sup> There is a distinction to be made here between the idea of nature as a proper mirror of God - a perfect sign system through which can be read God's intentions for man - and the use of nature as a negative zone. Camille states that the 'assumption often made about marginal animals is that they show a 'love of nature' in the modern, Romantic sense. However, animals and birds were lower than man in the medieval order of things and were there for him to exploit for meat, sport or vellum-making. This, above all, is why they share the margins with the bestial Bebewyn and the brutish peasant.' Camille *op cit.*, p. 47. Dominantly romance in genre, *Sir Gowther* begins from and maintains literal level chivalric themes and motifs. Correspondingly, the listener enters the tale from the point of view of secularly positioned courtly subjects. But when the tale is perceived solely in these human terms problems are encountered: why is the orchard *not* a place of harmony? Placing the orchard and its activities at the margin of court life highlights the perspectival distinction that the creation represented is not a fallen one, but rather seen through fallen eyes. In relation to the transcendence of the conclusion the natural is only contingently negative when a symbol in this particular context, where its full significance has yet to be read within the economy of accretive imagery. At the literal level a place of chaotic desire, this is only so in relation to the specified context of the prayer and the 'careless' desire for a child. This is why the natural is also positive, and Gowther, the product of an act of desire in a natural context, will progress from this natural state to realise his potential and demonstrate the potential of all men: 'All bodies have a likeness to good things which are invisible' says Richard of Saint - Victor [*Benjamin Major*, 11, 12 (*PL*, 196, col. 90)] cited in ET by Eco (1959) *op cit.* p. 59.

<sup>399</sup> Discussed below in relation to Celtic analogues. For general discussion See Curtius, *op cit.*, pp. 38, 106 - 127, 198, 400, 441, 444. In particular depth in relation to birth see Gregory B. Stone, *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages: On Boccaccio's Metaphysics* (London: Macmillan, 1998) pp. 17, 23, 29, 35 - 6, 44, 54, 72 - 73, 83, 102. In William Dunbar's (c.1420 - c.1513) *The Goldyn Targe* the dream allegory involves the shield of Reason facing forces intent of penetrating its defence, forces personified as 'Nature and Venus, quene and quene', Dame Beautee, Dame Venus, and Dame Flora. Apart from Priapus and Phanus, Classical Gods of fertility, cultivation and wilderness, these temptations from reason are all figurative tropes bestowed with female gender. In Langland's *Piers Plowman* Nature as a metonymic attribute of God, though, is male. As there is no direct reference to nature in *Gowther*, and its only representative male, the text clearly conforms to the wild - man topoi where nature is digressive in relation to spiritual ideology, anthropomorphically symbolised by half - human figures such as wild - men or hybrid men.

be seen to result in predictable consequences. In the *DPR* supernatural men, *fauni*, *satiri*, *cenoccephali* and *pilosis*, are solely motivated by lechery. They ‘sleep wommen in þe dede of leccery if þey takeþ hem walkynge in woodes’ (*DPR*, 18. 48). Like a morality lesson, natural, especially sylvan environments, are describes as dangerous and ‘out of bounds’. Courtly separation is the prescribed antidote to a natural world which threatens to infringe its boundaries and impinge upon the human with that which is distinctly anthropomorphic, and represents human animality. In reality there can be no boundary, because a spiritually idealised mankind cannot be separated from its animal self in *this* life. Warnings about illicit sexual relations between courtly ladies and supernatural men signify profound anxieties about the regeneration of bestial aspects of man, typified by the very animal *act* of copulation itself. While mankind is already an animal, indulging in animal activity reaffirms his bestial nature, thereby continuing a post-lapsarian metamorphosis toward the bestial and the beast. The parallels between the *satiri* and Gowther are clear; on asking a satyr what he was, St. Anthony received the reply ‘I am dedliche and oon of hem þat woneþ in wildernesse’ (*DPR* 18. 43). Correspondingly, the fiend’s telling the duchess that Gowther will ‘weppons wygthly weld’ (*Gow.* 75) prefigures the violent, deadly nature of Gowther, while prophesying his marginalisation as a man. In addition, the young Gowther’s Anti-Christian tendencies are analogous to the satyr - a Pagan embodiment of an animal - who looks like a man, but whose metaphoricity speaks of the deadly nature of a corporeality from which God is absent or ignored. In this sense, the displacement of courtly ideals by the expedient in a ‘natural’ or woodland location (‘on what maner scho ne roghth’), provides a context for exploring the impingement of dangerously permeable boundaries between the human (the duchesses’ status and her prayer) and the animal (her openness to sex in the orchard).

The appalling revelation that the man in the orchard is not at all that he appears to be signs a literal to allegorical modulation, made obvious by the disjunctive appearance of the ‘fiend’ into the narrative. But the theological perspective of the duchess’ request is maintained by the thematisation of scriptural inversions.

When he had is wylle all don,  
 A felturd fende he start up son,  
 And stode and hur beheld.  
 He sayd, ‘Y have geyton a chylde on the  
 That in is yothe full wylde schall bee  
 And weppons wyghtly weld.’

(*Gow.* 70 - 75).

This is the first of many inversions of scripture in the text. As already observed Gowther, like Christ, is the product of a ‘miraculous conception’. However, the begetting of a son by an unholy fiend is a travesty of the immaculate conception, only compounded by the duchess’ lie to her husband that she has had a dream that she is to conceive a child: ‘Tonyght we mon geyt a chyld, / That schall owre londus weld’ (*Gow.* 80 - 81) when she is fully aware that the conception has already taken place. She insists that the same night they should ‘geyt a chyld’ (*Gow.* 80) because ‘An angell com fro hevon bryght / And told me so this same night’ (*Gow.* 83 - 84). In this way, the act of sex is allegorised by its collocation with the scripturally typological, supernatural conception, where meaning is inverted theologically to encompass a bestial conception by the beast. From this perspective, the act is purely physical, and performed by the fiend with evil intent.

Sub-textually, it is here that the theological perspective is underpinned by a philosophical one in the form of the medieval conception of the woman as the prime principle of generation in the corporeal context. There is a sense in which culpability falls on the duchess by default rather than agency, because she is female. Her body is the prime ‘principle of generation’<sup>400</sup> in the corporeal context. In Aristotelian terms, the male (in this context the ‘fende’) brings nothing material to the process of reproduction, but rather brings his form to the material body of the mother who provides a corporeal body for the child’s soul. The imprint, interjected into the *materia* of the maternal body, is the realm of the father, his function being that he is a

<sup>400</sup> *Parts* 656 a., 10 - 15. For a detailed discussion, see appendix C.

disembodied site of origin. In this sense, Gowther's soul and sinfulness are externally imposed. The functional, animal role of the maternal body, on the other hand, is that it is destined to become an embodied or corporeal delivery system producing a genital outcome. Aristotle's literal sense exposition of the generation of the animal explains both mankind's duality as an animal, and in an analogous way, the duality of Gowther himself. Literally, all men are hybrid, born of a definitively animal process, though allegorically, Gowther's 'fiendish' hybridisation is a literary amplification, which allows the exploration of the boundaries of the human. In spite of the father, Gowther's origin and man's origin, are shared corporeal origins in that all are, in the most literal sense, animals.

#### 4. 1 (c) Hybridity as allegory

At the literal level Gowther's sin is, as it is for all mankind, inherited. Gowther's exceptionally sinful acts, however, have a more immediate and diabolical derivation. Literally, his actions, and the tale itself may *seem* improbable. However, it is at an allegorical level that the theme of aberrant sin is represented. E. M. Bradstock sees the central concern of the text as being a meditation over extreme sin and the possibility of atonement. The greater the sin the more significant the redemption and dispensation of God's grace and mercy. Bradstock comments that '[t]he subject matter, apprehended at a symbolic level, ceases to be improbable and effectively exemplifies this theme'<sup>401</sup> to amplify the patterns of penitence which interweave through the text at a moral or anagogic level, and where the central question to be established is, what is the state of Gowther's soul?

Once fully-grown, Gowther is defined by lechery, and concerned with little other than his own wilful desire to do evil. He is a 'Warlocke great' (*Gow.* 22), a powerful demon who was conceived in a time when the fiend had the power to appear to women

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<sup>401</sup> Bradstock, *op cit.*, p. 3.

in ‘likenesse of here fere’, or husband (*Gow.* 9). We are also told that Gowther is the magician Merlin’s half brother, as the fiend begot them both: ‘So that he begat Merlyng and mo / And wrought ladies so mikil wo’ (*Gow.* 10 - 11). Merlin, in the same way, allows Uther Pendragon to ‘win’ the mother of Arthur, by taking on the appearance of her husband. The ‘fende’ was evidently very active in this respect, confirmed when we are told that such beings exist in earthly form to do nothing more than tempt and copulate with human women:

Thei servyd never of odyr thyng  
 But forto temp[t]e wemen yong:  
 To deyle with hom was wrothe.  
 (*Gow.* 97 - 99)

The message is clear; young women should resist the temptation to have any ‘dealings’ with these bestial entities. In the *DPR*, wild-men from woodland locations are described as existing for the sole purpose of lechery, and invariably direct their lust toward human women:

Certeyn bestes beþ ycleped *fauni* and *satiri* also and beþ bestes wonderliche  
 yschape wiþ likenesse and schappe of men but þay beþ nought ful partyn[er]s  
 of resoun of mankynde ... suche bestes beþ ful lecherous, in so moche þat þey  
 sleep wommen in þe dede of leccery if þey takeþ hem walkynge in woodes.  
 (*DPR* 18. 48).

While the act of copulation with the fiend does not kill the duchess, she does suffer from Gowther’s ferocity in biting and ripping off her nipple, when she first tries to feed him. Subsequently, Gowther is given to the charge of nine wet-nurses, whom he kills in the very act of feeding, draining them dry of milk, and in the process, of life itself. When hunting, nuns become Gowther’s pray. They are ‘full ferd of his body’ and meet ‘lecherous’ ends when he and his men ‘leyn hom by’ and then ‘brend hom up’ (*Gow.* 184 - 188). They are raped and then burned alive in their nunnery:

Nor no prechyng of no frere,  
 That dar I heyly hette.  
 [Erly and] late, lowde and styl,/  
 He wold wyrke is fadur wyll  
 Wher he stod or sete.  
 Hontyng lufde he aldurbest,  
 Parke, wodd and wylde forest,  
 Bothe be weyus and strete. (170 - 177)

When Gowther hunts, his natural environment is woodland, where he goes about his father's business in pursuit of churchmen and women. '[Erly and] late, lowde and styl, / He wold wyrke is fadur wyll', is another inversion of scripture, '*nesciebatis quia in his quae Patris mei sunt oportet me esse?*' [And He said to them, how is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?] (Luke 2. 49), which draws attention to Gowther's antithetical nature at a theological level. His actions are set against the approved institutions of virginity and marriage, as well as against representatives of the church (*perfecti*). His actions supply the focus of interpretative complexity which warrant exploration because it is, initially at least, unclear whether Gowther should be read as a man or an animal. To begin with Gowther's conception is, quite literally, inconceivable as anything other than symbolic, as is his analogous identity to the animal. But such incredible actions and events, coupled with the use of the animal analogy, provides the best possible sign, and best method of Christian debate. Quidditatively, the nature of man is defined through a comparison which produces an apparently implausible sign, but which in its turn offers the clearest of signs.

While Gowther's forced conception indicates a profound anxiety about the re-generation or perpetuation of bestial aspects of man, the stark descriptions of his raping and pillage confirm the inherently bestial and grotesque nature of his transgressive behaviour. Thus man, already universally categorised as an animal, can



easily embody the form of his bestial nature, thereby continuing a post-lapsarian digression. It is a grotesque contravention of his spiritual status as a man, and finds its hermeneutic equivalence in Bartholomaeus' descriptions of *pilosis* and *cenocephali*, wild-men who rape human women. Bartholomaeus explains the noun incubus to be 'doynge þe dede of generacioun' (DPR 18. 84). *Pilosis*, we are told, exist for the purpose of copulation alone. However, beneath their questionable appearance they are like men, merely taking the shape of a beast. This inter-changeability confounds categories, and reveals the animal within each human. That the primary characteristic of *Pilosis* is lust, suggests a prescriptive warning that by immoral acts human people can descend to the level of the animal, allowing the beast that is always contained within to emerge.

If man bears corporeal similarity to God, where does this situate Gowther, who is a man bearing God's image? In part, the answer is rhetorical: to know man you must first understand his corporeality. Bartholomaeus states 'þe properties of man schulde be þe more opunliche iknowe to bestis-sche men ... of þe which he is imaade and compond ...' (DPR 3. 1). Man is a beast first and foremost – an animal made in God's image. Indeed while Gowther is made in his Father's image he is, in the physical and reproductive sense, also made in his father the devil's image. Like the supernatural beings of the bestiary, Gowther has an uncertain ontology, where it is unclear whether he is a man in the making or unmaking. Fiends have, or take on, a human appearance and therefore presumably have the capacity for advanced reasoning, but their half-animal natures suggest that their behaviour is governed by baser physical instincts. In these terms the fantastical appearance or actions of the half-man always retain an overt suggestion of metaphoricity. The figurative, allegorical representation of Gowther as an animal, in other words, reveals the dangerous animality of all men. Only by repenting of his animality, does he become a man in the making, though not before we have been shown how much more like an animal than a God a man *can* be. Only through the process of *caninisation*, and a transitionally symbolic animal body, does he become a good Christian subject. In an accretive sense, the text constitutes a comprehensively readable set of metaphors whose identity

depends upon mankind's corporeal kinship with the beast. Thus, the 'educational' part of Gowther's journey to God, takes him back to the realm of the purely animal where at his 'lowest' point he 'becomes' a dog. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153) asks if grotesque metaphoric representations such as this can possibly be of use, when he criticises the ostentation of church decoration, and the marginalia of scholarly invention: 'What profit is there in those ridiculous monsters, in that marvellous and deformed comeliness, that comely deformity? To what purpose are those unclean apes, those fierce lions, those monstrous centaurs, those half men ...?'<sup>402</sup> In contrast the intellectual apprehension of visible grotesquery is seen positively by Pseudo – Dionysius, also known as Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius expresses a clear preference for a disordered imagery, which should stimulate the imagination of an audience who should not 'remain' with the symbol but move to its spiritual realities. What Richard of Saint - Victor described as the 'analogical signification' of the celestial hierarchy of Dionysius involves 'the reason and the imagination, wholly together as mistress and handmaiden' motivating the early stages of the soul's 'journey to God' but being 'rejected in the higher reaches of contemplation.'<sup>403</sup> It is, therefore, much more appropriate to describe God in terms which signify not what He is but rather what he is not ... when God is referred to as ... a wild beast ... the mind is not allowed to rest there, but stimulated to remove all material qualities from its thinking about God.<sup>404</sup>

Gowther's animality, though odd, clearly expresses a concern about the transgression of all men to their essential animal nature, and prescribes a spiritual antidote to the human condition. In this sense, *Sir Gowther* presents strange animal analogies which produce, metaphysically, the clearest of signs because the conditions under which the 'animal' sign is seen to be symbolically useful, are the conditions of the sign's allegorical autonomy within an ultimate unity of Christian values. In his novel *The*

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<sup>402</sup> St Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum* or Apology to William, Abbot of St. Thiery, cited by E. G. Holt, *A documentary History of Art*, Vol. 1 (London: Doubleday, 1957) p. 21. Umberto Eco sees a paradox in these lines, in that Bernard's analysis is extraordinarily fine, and that a characteristic of that language used to denounces the poetic and plastic arts is that is 'exceptionally well-wrought'. See Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, *op cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>403</sup> Minnis, 1986 *op cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>404</sup> Minnis attributes this to Gallus' commentary on Dionysius, Minnis, 1986 *op cit.*, p. 170 - 171.

*Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco also attributes this argument to Dionysius the Areopagite, and Hugh of St Victor. The wondrous ‘*aenigmate*’ of fantastical creatures and the ‘Babewyn’ of an inverted world are designated different symbolic meanings and discourses, as depicted in Adelmo’s psalter. When the character Jorge of Burgos disputes this, Eco’s protagonist William of Baskerville retorts:

But as the Areopagite teaches ... God can be named only through the most distorted things. And Hugh of St. Victor reminded us that the more the simile becomes dissimilar, the more the truth is revealed to us under the guise of horrible and indecorous figures, the less the imagination is sated in carnal enjoyment, and is thus obliged to perceive the mysteries hidden under the turpitude of the images ...<sup>405</sup>

Jorge then sets up Saint Bernard as opposition: ‘the man who depicts monsters ... no longer sees except through them.’<sup>406</sup> While clearly incredible at the literal level, it seems unlikely that Gowther’s first audience would identify with the negative aspects of his character in this way. However, the explicit implication of metaphoricity and symbolism suggests that Gowther’s ‘meaning’ is one unmistakably indicative of an attempt to define the human against the animal. He presents an implausible, though metaphysically perceptible sign, prescribing Christian ideals and courtly aspirations as a means to transcending human animality.

#### 4. 1 (d) Caninisation to canonisation

When Gowther arrives at Rome he is granted an audience with the pope, and is told:

‘Lye down thi fachon then the fro;  
Thou schallt be screvon or Y goo

<sup>405</sup> See Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980) pp. 77 - 80.

<sup>406</sup> Eco *ibid.*, pp. 77 - 80.

And asoyly[d] or Y blyn.'  
 'Nay, holy fadur,' seyde Gwother,  
 'This bous me nedus with mee beyr:  
 My frendys ar full thyn.'  
 'Wherser thou travellys be northe or soth,  
 Thou yet no meyt bot that thou revus of howndus mothe,  
 Cum thy body within;  
 Ne no worde speke for evyll ne gud,  
 Or thou reydé tokyn have fro God  
 That forgyfyn is thi syn.'

(Gow. 286 - 297)

Gowther is instructed that, as part of his penance for the wrongs of his past, he must give up the sword or 'facion' which he made. While he refuses to do this, however, he does conform to the penance that he will eat no meat apart from that received from the mouths of dogs, and cease hunting animals and men. In addition, he must not speak until he has received a sign from God that his penance is complete. Anne Rooney has commented that the chivalric hero must give up hunting when an adventure presents itself. More important still are the demands of the soul:

... we find in saint's lives a hunt interrupted by the Word of God. Here hunting must give way before the greater work of Christ. ... The saints lives which use this motif demonstrate dramatically the major concerns of all the other religious hunting motifs: that hunting is an acceptable profane activity, but that it must always give way before the church.<sup>407</sup>

In these terms, God's intervention in Gowther's life, in the person of the Pope, requires that he be abstinent from worldly pleasures such as hunting, especially given that Gowther had a particular partiality for hunting men. Rather than be the hunter he must be like an animal, thereby relying on compassion in order to obtain food.

<sup>407</sup> Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1993) p. 196.

Gowther's forgiveness, and his becoming a man and a Christian subject, depends upon the constant reminder of what he was. While in Rome the only food he eats is stolen from a dog. Outside Rome he stays on a hill for three days, a greyhound bringing him some meat each night, and on the third day, bringing him a loaf of white bread.

Gowther does not have to fight for the food that dogs bring him. Rather, he is treated as one of them, confirming his kinship with, and similarity to, the beast, while the loaf of bread on the third day is clearly eucharistic, pre-empting his conversion and resurrection as a man.

Gowther's journey takes him to the castle of an emperor, which he enters, sitting by the dais in the castle hall. The steward tries to chase him away like a dog: 'To beyt hym bot he wende away' (*Gow.* 334), but Gowther will not leave. When the emperor guesses that Gowther is performing penance, he suggests a way to administer food:

Thei gaffe tho hondus meyt ynoghe;  
 Tho dompe duke to hom he droghe:  
 That was is best beld.  
 Among tho howndys thus was he fed ...

(*Gow.* 361 - 364)

Food is given to the castle dogs, so that Gowther may take it and eat. Gowther, like the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16. 21) who is compared to a dog, eats scraps from the table (Matt. 15. 26 – 27; Mark 7. 27 – 28) while he sits on the floor with other dogs. While Bartholomaeus Anglicus reports that 'þe cruelnesse of an hound abateþ if a man sitteþ on grounde' (*DPR* 18. 25), Beryl Rowland comments that 'the virtuous dog does not lose his savagery',<sup>408</sup> and as the tale progresses this is clearly the case. Bartholomaeus' chapter on the dog focuses closely on its faithfulness to man. He also describes how the hound belonging to Ticius Sabinus was said not to have forsaken his body after his death. When a man gave the hound meat to eat 'þe hound took þe mete and wolde haue ysette in his mouþ þat was deed' (*DPR* 18. 25). There is a sense in which

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<sup>408</sup> Rowland *op cit.*, p 155.

Gowther, during his penance, is in a state of purgatory; he is a tormented and isolated soul inhabiting a beastly, deathly body. Bartholomaeus' tale of Ticius Sabinus, while emphasising the faithful qualities of the hound, suggests that until Gowther's penance is complete, his animal state is a deathlike one with which the hounds around him empathise, in their attempts to bring him meat. It is clear in this scenario that despite being at the centre of noble life, there is also a sense in which Gowther lives in isolation from the human community, in that his place within it is always with dogs: Among tho howndus down he hym seytt, / Tho meyd on for tho greyhondus feytt' (Gow. 505 - 506). While Gowther's *caninisation* accretes both literal and symbolic meaning, it may also be seen as a topos that generates meaning by further allusion to scriptural antecedents. At this point, the potentially spiritual nature of man, and of Gowther as a particularly animalistic man, is revealed by his juxtaposition with a new Other in the tale - that of the Saracen. It is against the Saracen that Gowther establishes his identity as a Christian subject. J. J. Cohen comments that '[b]ecause he embodies fears about the fragility of Christian identity in the face of the Saracen threat, the medieval cynocephalus was a viscerally disturbing figure, very like a giant.'<sup>409</sup> In this statement, Cohen draws attention to the fact that black - skinned men were frequently identified with both Islam as well as with *cynocephali*, or dog-men, in chivalric romance. Indeed a revealing comparison can be made with St. Christopher, 'born a pagan and called Reprobis, reminding of Abominable in his unredeemed state, he changes his name to Christopher [Christ carrier] when converted to Christianity... In some accounts the form of this saint changes upon his conversion.'<sup>410</sup> Gowther, like St. Christopher who was a giant as well as a cynocephalus, begins his life as a monster and at his death is transfigured into an icon - a dog-man who is destined to preach the word of God. In Dominican thought the dog takes on a particular symbolic significance as both the animal most faithful to man, as well as the most faithful animal to God. The Dominicans saw themselves as the dogs of the Lord (a pun on *domini - canes*) who chased away the heretical wolves from attacking the faithful

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<sup>409</sup> Cohen *op cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>410</sup> John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and thought* (1981: New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000) p. 72.

sheep.<sup>411</sup> Saint Dominic's mother, as Gowther's mother, experienced a disturbing presence, when while pregnant she dreamt that she has a little dog in her womb. From this theological perspective it can be seen that the accretive imagery encapsulates images of Gowther as animalistic man, symbolic dog and, in his similarity to the Saracen or 'hethon hownde' (*Gow.* 389) a potential threat to Christian selves. All men, though, are capable of conversion and baptism into the church. If the cynocephalic saint is indeed a topos, Gowther's caninisation provides a pre-emptive recognition that all Christian life is characterised by animal instincts and behaviour on the one hand, and the ability to aspire to transcend this by spirituality, on the other.

#### 4. 1 (e) Fighting the Saracen foe

The refusal of the emperor to allow a Persian prince (the 'hethon hownde', *Gow.* 389) to marry his daughter instigates a war with the 'sarsyns blake' (*Gow.* 472). Gowther fights three battles against the Saracen, for God, and for the emperor's daughter, who alone knows of his participation. She 'sees and knows everything that is going on; she is remote but mutely sympathetic.'<sup>412</sup> On each occasion, Gowther prays to God to send him arms (*Gow.* 400 - 409, 460 ff, 554 - 557) and on the three consecutive occasions horse and armour appear, first in black, then red, and finally in white.<sup>413</sup> The way in which Gowther is miraculously supplied with a horse and armour is clearly representative of the process of his becoming a Christian knight; he acts humbly, to the benefit of others, and is anonymous to all but the dumb lady, who will later become his wife. God grants his wish, and in the appearance of the three suits of

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<sup>411</sup> See Hall, James, *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (1974: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 105.

<sup>412</sup> Mills *op cit.*, xxv.

<sup>413</sup> Marchalonais suggests that the investment of the armour can be understood by colour symbolism. She sees an alchemical relationship between the colours and the amplification and particularising of the process of Gowther's conversion. Black is the beginning of all processes, but also stands for sin and penitence; red stands for the blood and wounds of the passion, fire as the life giving force, ecstasy and sublimation; and white is illumination and purity. See Shirley Marchalonais, 'Sir Gowther: the process of a Romance', *Chaucer Review* 6, 1971, pp. 14 - 29. For a general context of the use of alchemy, colour and its symbolism, see Eco 1986 *op cit.*, pp. 54 - 55.

armour, the metaphysical occurrence becomes an expression of ontological participation. This is paralleled at a courtly level in the behaviour of the emperor's daughter. It is she who takes pity on him, washes the mouths of hounds with wine, and gives them loaves for Gowther to eat: 'tho meydton toke too gruhowndus fyn / And waschyd hor mowthus cleyn with wyn, / And putte a lofe in tho ton, And in tho todur flesch full gud' (*Gow.* 442 - 445).

Drawing attention to the fact that Gowther is, at this point, still living like a dog, such description is collocated with the descriptions of the Saracen as 'hethon hownde', and is consciously done so to alert the audience to similarities between the Saracen foe and Gowther. The biblical use of hounds as epithets of contempt is common among romance writers. The hound is a heathen in Laymon's *Brut* (16623) and a Saracen king, in *King Horn* (1465). Like the Pigmies of Bartholomaeus' bestiary, the Saracen are bestial at best. Indeed, the comparison of the Saracen with hounds, together with their potential for conversion to Christianity, has original parity with the wild - man figure; the prototype of cynocephalus is thought to be Greek, but was freely associated with the East.<sup>414</sup> Gowther retains his falchion, the curved, single - edged sword of the Saracen, and thus maintains his connection with the Saracen. However, the falchion can be seen as an adjunct to his character, and a personal talisman.<sup>415</sup> It symbolises the inherently bestial side of his nature, his anti-Christian similarity to the Saracen, and its final use upon them as a symbolic negation of any residual audience doubt that Gowther has at last transcended his bestial origins.

While it may be an apt weapon for persecuting Christians, it is also a constant reminder that however animalistic a non-Christian may be, he has the potential to become a man through baptism. In the same way, as a physical body is seen to conform to the soul of its possessor, the falchion is an arbiter of individual intention: '[l]ike its Saracen creators who had their dark origins in the race of Cain but were

<sup>414</sup> Wittkower, R., *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) pp. 54 - 55.

<sup>415</sup> David Salter explains that 'The Middle English Dictionary defines *faucōun* (*fachoun*) as: "A large broad sword with a curved blade, a falchion: also, a short stabbing-sword or dagger." According to the *OED*, a falchion is "A broad sword more or less curved with the edge on the convex side ..."' David Salter, *op cit.*, p. 72 (n).



always reclaimable by baptism, and like Gowther himself who was born of a devil, this falchion has the potential for good and evil.<sup>416</sup> The binary opposites of good and bad, Christian and pagan, which characterise the battles, are equivalent to the battle Gowther has over himself to win back his soul, and to become a man. There is a clear objective correlative in this representation of man's potential for good and evil. In the material world, with a corporeal body, and living in a contingent context, clear binaries and boundaries are inadequate. Evil, for example, only exists in a contingent sense, when man turns from God to follow his animalistic tendencies. Such a turning away from God is itself an act of self - will condemned in the tale by the emphasis on God's final acceptance of Gowther, once Gowther has acted without himself in mind. Gowther's soul was in a poor state until he realised that his will did not ultimately matter: rather he realised that what mattered was not *my will* but *Thy will*. In the corporeal context, man cannot alone win conflicts over good and bad, he can merely give himself to God's will. He cannot win the battle of good and evil – he can only make himself an instrument of either.

In his animal body, man cannot win or maintain total control over himself.

Theologically, the Saracens in *Sir Gowther* symbolize the uncontrollable nature of the animal side of humanity, which could potentially be absorbed and negated, but which as a chaotic threat must be displaced as irreducibly Other. David White comments on the way that men who did not conform to the prevailing norm represented such a chaotic threat, and must be expelled from ordered society.

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<sup>416</sup> Bradstock *op cit*, p. 7. The use of the fauchion or falchion usually signifies a pagan threat. In *The Green Knight* (-c.1500) a knight named Sir Bredbeddle has a wife who is in love with Gawain. Though she has never met Gawain she loves him (secretly and passionately) for his renowned courtesy. Her mother is a witch called Agostes who can 'transpose' (GK 52) knights so that they appear to have been killed in battle. Knowing of her daughter's love she transposes her son-in-law into a green knight so that he can go to Arthur's court and test Gawain's boldness, courtesy and hardiness. The knight comes to Carlisle on Christmas day dressed in green, and while the porter thought him a 'marvelous groome.' (GK 92) It is clear that the magic by which Agostes "transpose[s]" his 'likeness' does not seem to transform his person, but just his 'vesture' into green (GK 105). Notable is his 'long fauchion verament' (GK 76). As in Ragnelle in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* and the wild Carle in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, Bredbeddle, transformed into green, constitutes a challenging pagan threat to Arthurian chivalric values. In *The Green Knight* however, the relatively easy resolution serves only to enforce the glamour of the Arthurian fellowship (numeration conforms to the editions in Hahn's edition of the texts).

The nomadic, swarming races (ethné) share the lot of those members within society who turn away from the established order – the heretics (choosers of an ideology that is not *the* ideology), marginals, members of an underground, traitors, and madmen. In order to maintain its claims to exclusivity in the realm of ideology, the centre must pursue and punish those outsiders who dwell within its borders.<sup>417</sup>

Though it is not acceptable that Gowther killed Christian subjects, he apparently performs God's works in killing the Saracen. While '[h]e raft bothe owt with eyggur mode, / That doghthy of body and bon' (*Gow.* 446 - 7) he also now loves the God who made him: '[l]ovyde [h]e God – in hart was full feyn - / That formed bothe blod and bon' (*Gow.* 626 - 627). Gowther returning to violence once again, is like the proverbial dog returning to its own vomit, the sinner returning to his wickedness (2. Peter. 2. 22). If such scriptural analogues provide illumination, it might be asked, why a dog? Dogs, along with fornicators, poisoners, murderers and idolaters are excluded from the heavenly abode (Rev. 22. 15). In Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*, the damned that God will consign to Hell are like hounds who are given bones and not meat (*ParsT*, X, 221). In this sense, Gowther presents not merely a strange sign, but a rhetorical device, existing as a fictive expression of scriptural and proverbial modes and analogues, which explain the state of his soul. At this point in the tale, however, Gowther is well on the way to completing his penance, and his digressive violence and regression to his former diabolical self, acceptable. In another Middle English romance, *The Seige of Melayne*, the characterisation of the French archbishop Turpin as a vigorous ecclesiastic who champions the church, seems at odds with the duality of his representation as a 'pagan'. Turpin heaps abuse upon the image of the Virgin, 'And he hyt redde, Y understonde', (*The Seige of Melayne* 548) when he hears about a French defeat. The mindless rage of a heroic figure is like 'a stock theme in the *chansons de geste* and the heroic romances ... in which a sultan, after hearing of the rout of his forces, did physical violence to the images of his gods.'<sup>418</sup> In these tales, an

<sup>417</sup> White *op cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>418</sup> Mills, *op cit.*, xiii., *The Seige of Melayne* also in this edition.

apparently diabolical energy is also acceptable if not encouraged, when directed against the Saracen.

#### 4. 1 (f) Summary

At the appearance of Gowther in his role as the stranger knights, the emperor's ironic question, 'Y ne wyst wher thei wer bred?' (*Gow.* 519), is one which reminds the audience of the romance that Gowther's was diabolically 'bred' like an animal. There is a sense in which the diabolical Gowther of the first part of the tale must die, in order that, at an anagogic level, he rises as a Christian subject from the death of his own animality. The strangeness of *Sir Gowther*, however, draws attention to the way in which poetic fiction illustrates and elucidates by producing metaphors as signs of man's bestiality, desire, and difference from the animal. *Sir Gowther* carries a particularly Christian prescription that man aspire to transcend his animal nature. It devalues mankind's animality, yet ennoble the beast through figures of hounds, whose intrinsic nobility is emblematic of Gowther's innate human nobility.<sup>419</sup> This is a typical synthesis of two sets of different values; the innate nobility, affection and fidelity of the animal, as ascribed to it by the Greeks, and the Roman '*Sagax*' who is not merely faithful, but has supernatural powers. Such a literary negotiation would seem to complicate rather than explain attitudes to the animal, though setting the tale aside other texts may provide an equivalent hermeneutic.

Giovanni Boccaccio notes that the poets and the theologians imagine the figurative inferno to be within the hearts of all men, and enlarge upon this idea. They interpret the meaning to be that material desires are difficult to break away from, even in hell: 'enlarging upon this fiction, they declare there to be a doorkeeper to this inferno, and this they say is Cerberus, infernal dog, which when interpreted means "devourer": pointing through him to the insatiability of our desires, which can never be satiated or

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<sup>419</sup> Salter *op cit.*, p 80.

satisfied.’<sup>420</sup> The dog’s duty is to ensure that no - one leaves the inferno, signifying that desires never leave man when in the inferno. He can be drawn out, though with difficulty: ‘this they demonstrate by imagining this dog to have been dragged out of the inferno by Hercules: that is, this insatiability for worldly desires to be stilled by the virtuous man and to be ejected from the heart of one so virtuous.’<sup>421</sup> Isidore of Seville comments that Cerberus has three heads: ‘signifying that there are three ages at which death devours man, that is, infancy, youth and old age.’<sup>422</sup> The trinal equivalence between the three ages of man and the heads of the dog has clear parallels with Gowther’s three hounds on three days, the three stages of his journey through life, and the three battles. Though I do not mean to suggest that the author of *Sir Gowther* had Cerberus in mind, it is also clear that such an understanding allows us to see Gowther’s diabolic, infernal life, driven by the fulfilment of material desires, to have been negated by his repentant Christian virtue. In rejecting worldly desires from his heart, Gowther became a dog, in order that he could empathise with and understand the animal within, in order to reject and transcend it.

#### 4. 2 The place of the animal in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*

The woodland setting is a romance convention in which the marvellous occurrences of the wood offer a plethora of readily transmutable symbols. It may be the site of chivalric acts, notably hunting. However, it is also a place for the animal, and has a threatening potential for transmogrification. In his archaeology of the wild man, Hayden White discusses the threat to civil society posed by the proximity of the anti-social or animalistic man who inhabits such environments: ‘he is just out of sight, over the horizon, in the nearby forest ... He sleeps in crevices, under great trees, or in

<sup>420</sup> ‘The new author: commentary on Dante’, reproduced in English translation by Minnis and Scott *op cit.*, p. 513.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 513.

<sup>422</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 11. 3, 33, cited in English translation by Grant 1999 *op cit.*, p. 120.

the caves of wild animals.’<sup>423</sup> Wild men and animal Others often serve as antithetical oppositions which highlight the contradictions and inconstancies of the dominant social norm. But when antithetical thinking fails to resolve issues surrounding these ‘others’ because they are revealed to be the same, they are represented as anomalies who threaten the coherence of the system into which they must be integrated, as Gowther, or from which they must be banished or exiled. Seeking them out involves the production of a fictive other by which to define socially acceptable versions of the chivalric human self. The notion of courtliness is not necessarily equivalent to the notion of Godliness, though it is important to note that courtliness is in part an aspiration to the higher Christian ideals of purity of action and thought, particularly in relation to others. Courtly men and women should aspire to transcend the grosser desires and actions of the physical. In this courtly context, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* addresses questions about culture and civilization in juxtaposition with man’s animal nature. Gawain needs to recognise his animality in order to transcend it. Ragnelle, the uncourtly Other against which Gawain is defined has all the oppositional features of the wild-man, and represents ‘a mode of life completely opposed to that represented by the knight’, she is ‘a symbol of unruly passions while the knight is consciously treated as a protagonist of an opposed way of life.’<sup>424</sup> Unlike the prevailing oppositional norm, Ragnelle is a woman, suggesting the importance of the male – female interaction in the public testing of Gawain’s courtesy. In contrast to the wild man, who inhabits peripheral locations, no transformation or confirmation of the chivalric self can be achieved in isolation from social and sexual practices. In order to realise his animalness Gawain must realise his similarity to the wild man: thus, the boundaries between them dissolve into fluidity in order that he realise what it is he must transcend. Indeed, the armour which keeps the wild men out in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is seen by many critics as the armour of an alienating identity from which Gawain looks outward, though it is a mere distraction from the quest to realise the true nature of his own flawed

<sup>423</sup> Hayden White, ‘The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea’, in Edward Dudley and Maximilian Novak (eds.) *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (London: Pittsburgh University Press, 1972) pp. 20 - 21.

<sup>424</sup> Larry D. Benson, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Massachusetts: Cambridge press, 1965) pp. 80 - 81.

humanity.<sup>425</sup> The woodland setting is important conventionally, then, where one hunt often triggers a parallel hunt and results in the capturing of an animal, or a person who displays animal attributes. Peter McClure follows this line of reasoning, suggesting that the boar and deer in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exhibit traits Gawain must avoid if he is to maintain the *mesure* appropriate to a knight.<sup>426</sup> In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*,<sup>427</sup> Dame Ragnelle is a woman likened to an animal in her hideous appearance and behaviour, in juxtaposition to which is placed the representative of the ideals of Arthur's court, Gawain. In this way Gawain's boldness, hardiness and courtesy are active qualities utilised against the mysterious and the animal which threaten the integrity of the ideals which he personifies.

In the tale, King Arthur meets a knight, Sir Gromer Somer Joure, while hunting in Inglewood forest south of his court at Carlisle.<sup>428</sup> The forest and the hunt are a

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<sup>425</sup> See Derek Brewer's 'The Arming Topos As Literature' in *A Companion to the Gawain - Poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, Arthurian studies series 38 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) p. 176 ff., J. A. Burrow's 'Honour and Shame In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*' in *Essays on Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1984) p. 119., and Dorothy Yamamoto's discussion of the wild man in her book *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 153 - 154.

<sup>426</sup> Peter McClure, 'Gawain's *mesure* and the significance of the three hunts in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Neuphilologus* 57 (1973) pp. 375 - 387.

<sup>427</sup> *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure* is extant in the late sixteenth century Bodleian 11951 (formerly Rawlinson C.86). Stephen Shepherd comments that 'The poem's date of composition is held to have been no earlier than the middle of the fifteenth century.' Stephen H. A. Shepherd, ed., *Middle English Romances: Authoritative Texts and Sources*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995) p. 243. He goes on to point out that Ragnelle is frequently collocated with *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and is a recognised analogue which 'employs the common European folk-tale motif of the "loathly lady" transformed' p. 378. The edition used here is *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* reproduced in Thomas Hahn, ed., *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, Teams Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1995), hereafter *Ragnelle*.

<sup>428</sup> Inglewood forest is a specific location, often mentioned (*Rag.* 16, 152, 226, 355, 764, 835) and constituting a common *topos* in the Gawain romances. Hahn writes 'It is perhaps worth noting that there is a Hutton in Inglewood forest, Cumberland; it is the neighbouring village to Hesketh, the Parish that contains the Tarn Wathelene. Madden [Madden, Frederic, ed. *Syr Gawayne: A collection of Ancient Romance - Poems* (London: Bannatyne Club, 1839)] ... says the 'whole of the territory hereabout was romance - ground.' (p. 334). A 'real' location, though now drained, the Tarn Wathelene was at the very centre of the Inglewood forest. Le Goff compares literary forests such as the *selva oscura* of Dante and the 'Gaste forêt' of Percival to the real which were the 'refuge of pagan spirits that were piteously attacked by monks, saints, and missionaries.' See Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilisation 400 - 1500*, trans. by Julia Barrow (1988: Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) p. 131. Cumbria, Carlisle and Inglewood forest in particular provide, in this way, the generic expectation that an adventure into the unknown will be encountered; the forest's natural otherness and the potential for meeting with its representatives, pagan, animal or supernatural, means that they can be challenged, tamed and contained by the formal, if artificial, society of the court, its Christian meaning system and its boundaries - and done so with the literary and allegory economy of the poetic text. In this way the cycle of Gawain 'Carlisle' romances have a striking regional coherence.

symbolic prelude to the adventure itself, signifying the entrance into an Otherworldly domain where rules change and the unexpected may occur. In the first instance the natural other arrives in the form of Sir Gromer Somer Joure, 'The Man of the Summer Day', whose name identifies him with the summer solstice. It is a turning point in the bucolic cycle, and he is a vestige of the yearly King, 'the earliest holder of Sovereignty over land he is unwilling to let go.'<sup>429</sup> If, as Manuel Aguirre suggests, the hunt convention is a symbol for some kind of courtship, *The Wife of Bath's Tale's* rape by the lusty bachelor would seem to be the literalisation of that symbol as a purely sexual act; in *Ragnelle*, however, it is the hunt itself which triggers a break in protocol, and which will result in the appearance of a loathly woman who literalises animal desire – thereby allowing the hunt for, and disclosure of, chivalric truth to supplant the purely sexual. The protocols of knightly courtesy are broken when Gromer approaches the King and accuses him of unjustly stripping his lands and awarding them to Gawain, and (albeit unwittingly) breaking filial and reciprocal obligation to him as a subject. Arthur agrees to a trial 'This othe I made unto that knyghte' (*Rag.* 173). A year to the day he must meet Gromer at the same location and answer the question of what it is that women desire above all else: 'whate wemen love best in feld and town' (*Rag.* 91).<sup>430</sup> In their attempt to discover the answer Gawain and Arthur fill two books with a plethora of answers, though as the day of the trial draws near they wander into the wood in the hope of finding a single, definitive, answer. Desperate for a solution Arthur asks Gawain to 'Lett make your hors redy / To ryde into straunge contrey' (*Rag.* 183 - 184). They enter once again into the dangerous natural, where Arthur comes across the loathsome Dame Ragnelle (later revealed to be Gromer's sister) who tells him that she is in possession of the answer but will only give it to him if she be allowed to marry Gawain. Gawain makes a

<sup>429</sup> Aguirre, Manuel, 'The Riddle of Sovereignty' in *Modern Language Review* 88. 2 (1993) pp. 273 - 282., p. 279.

<sup>430</sup> The parallel with *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is immediately obvious here, as is the conventional stipulation that a year be given for the completion of the task. 'To com agayn att thys twelfe monthes endyng' (104) is a romance convention also prominent in tales such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The topos of 'a year-to-the-day' or 'a year-and-a-day' can be seen in terms of the seasonal cycle of time, and usually begins during the winter and most notably at Christmas – a time of Yuletide transmogrification - in order that rejuvenation be paralleled by the rebirth and re-harmonisation of the year. It also, of course, offers proof of perseverance, and therefore personal worth.

promise to Arthur that he will marry Ragnelle, in order that the King may acquit himself by providing the answer to the question posed.

The challenge requires three seemingly impossible answers, or answers which fall outside of what the knight might consider reasonable: a) That women desire sovereignty over men, b) that a young knight marry an old Hag and c) that the proper choice is surrendering the right to choice. Correspondingly, any analysis must address the nature of the unreasonable, the symbol of the woman or loathly lady, and the concept of sovereignty.

#### 4. 2 (a) *Thys huntynge lykys me nott welle: the conventions*

The plot of *Ragnelle* is a shared episode which lies at the base of many of the Gawain romances and poses complex decisions for the court. At the literal level the immediate problem is that Ragnelle *appears* to be less than an ideal bride for Gawain, being visually offensive, resembling an animal, and unaware of ‘correct’ or courtly behaviour. However, the plot depends upon Ragnelle’s repulsive if illusory appearance and behaviour being juxtaposed with the chivalric ideals and rewards for truth at Arthur’s court. The metamorphosis tradition, in other words, reveals the complexities of the vow for exploration at the level of the practicalities of human relations by compromising the dominant version of what the human *is*, by revealing the potential threat from the animal emerging from within: ‘At the heart of *Ragnelle* lies the question of how the unknown, the marvellous, or the threatening is brought into line with the legitimate, normative, idealised chivalric society.’<sup>431</sup> Only in this way may Ragnelle’s transformation from an enigmatic threat to a beautiful woman confirm the importance of keeping the vows that not just legitimate the court’s chivalric ideology, but allow the human to transcend its animal nature by reason and Christian virtue. Correspondingly the plot’s resolution depends on the transformation

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<sup>431</sup> Hahn *op cit.*, p. 41.



of the heroine both from a symbolic animal into a beautiful lady, and from a badly constructed, enigmatic human threat, to a unitary subject and courtly lady. The very duality of being both Beauty and Beast ‘often attracts itself to women in popular romance’<sup>432</sup> and endows Ragnelle in particular with the deep ambiguity of being potentially fatal, yet having life-giving knowledge. Corresponding to conventions as it does, the tale’s audience would be worried that Gawain agrees so readily to the marriage (*Rag.* 342 – 345) were it not for the convention itself, which indicates that the conclusion will be a positive one. Within these conventional modes the reference to Ragnelle as ‘a fend’ (*Rag.* 345), is an element of which the audience may be already aware, and a fine use of dramatic irony. It prefigures and sign-posts the didactic lesson of the tale. Though he is initially unaware of the fact, Ragnelle will later tell Gawain how she was enchanted by her stepmother by ‘nygramancy’ and ‘enchauntement’, ‘Thus was I disformyd’ (*Rag.* 691- 699). In this way the tale is both an exploration of oaths and bonds in the context of courtesy, and an exploration of mankind’s animal tendencies, to which courtesy itself is an antidote.

The resolution of the tale is, again, conventional, in that the life – giving knowledge is attained by Gawain’s allowing Ragnelle to choose whether she will be ugly by night and beautiful by day, or the other way around. By doing this Gawain unwittingly gives Ragnelle the ‘sovereynté’ (*Rag.* 697, 701) which will break the spell under which she has been kept: a worthy man’s abdication to her, of complete sovereignty over him, negates and normalises her threat. Thus the loathsome Ragnelle, in return for crucial information, the demand of sexual favour from the hero, and his compliance in fulfilling his bond, is finally transformed into the ideal courtly woman.<sup>433</sup> Clearly the connection between the hunt, the animal and obtaining

<sup>432</sup> Hahn *ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>433</sup> A common convention, the same resolution occurs in Chaucer’s Wife’s tale: Wommen desiren to have sovereyntee / As wel over his housbond as hir love, / And for to been in maistrie hym above. (WBT, 1038 - 1040) In Gower’s ‘The Fate of Florent’, an ugly hag is met in woodland, with the offer of an answer of what women most desire ‘[t]hat alle wommen lievest wolde / Be sovereign of mannes love: / For what womman is so above, / Sche hath, as who seith, al hire wille; / And elles may sche noght fulfille / What thing hir were lievest have. (*Confessio Amantis*, I. 1608 - 1613). In a similar Gawain romance to *Ragnelle*, *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, we are told that ‘A woman will have her will, / And this is all her cheef desire’ (*The Marriage* 104 - 105) which is almost identical to Ragnelle’s ‘[o]f the moste manlyest is oure desyre: / To have the sovereynte of suche a syre, / Suche is oure crafte and gynne. (*Rag.* 422 - 430).

a lady's favour is that the hunt itself is an exploratory adventure into the nature of the natural: 'All three are challenges, tests in which the protagonist's abilities are pitted against the Other, whether this Other manifests itself in the magic of the White Stag, the deceptive road to the Grail, or the mysterious behaviour of Woman'. Against the hunt is set the riddle motif as a symbol for the search for truth, and which in itself gives verbal shape to the test.<sup>434</sup>

What makes *Ragnelle* different from the conventions it shares with other romances is the way in which Ragnelle, when compared with an animal, is set in opposition to the chivalric courtesy of Gawain and the court. Specifically, it is against the courtesy shown toward women for which Gawain is famous, as well as his verbal, rather than physical prowess, referred to in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as 'luf talkyng' (*Rag.* 927).<sup>435</sup> This verbal expression of courtesy operates at the same level of the oath: Gawain's word is an expression of his honest, noble intentions directed to an individual lady. But Ragnelle subverts his avowed intentions, which are verbally expressed, by revealing Gawain's promise to be in reality with Arthur and little to do with the courtesy for which he is renowned. In this first instance Gawain's apparent 'vow' with Ragnelle, is a gesture empty of the avowed intention to her which should be its origin. At their first meeting Ragnelle anticipates that they will 'plyghte us togeder' (*Rag.* 528), but Gawain ignores Ragnelle and gives his response – that he is ready to fulfil the promise he made to Arthur – directly to the king: "Syr, I am redy of that I you hyghte" (*Rag.* 534). Indeed, according to Ragnelle, Gawain's courtesy is singularly motivated by his fealty to the king: 'Yett for Arthours sake kysse me at the leste' (*Rag.* 635) Ragnelle later has to ask. Questions about the various motivations in the text are visible, though, in a retrospective point of textual rupture, where absolute chivalric ideals are undercut by contingent and expedient actions, in two elements which subvert the integrity of Arthur himself. Firstly, Arthur in effect

<sup>434</sup> Aguirre *op cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>435</sup> Gawain embodies the courtesy of Arthur's court. Arthur is a 'King curteys and royalle' (*Rag.* 6) in whose 'contry was nothyng butt chyvalry' (*Rag.* 10) and Gawain the 'flowre' (*Rag.* 373) of that courtesy. *The Poems of the Pearl manuscript: Pearl, Cleaness, Patience, Sir Gawain Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, York Medieval Texts., 2nd series (Berkeley 1978: London: Edward Arnold, 1979).

volunteers Gawain for marriage to Ragnelle without first consulting him, thereby negating the personal freedom of Gawain's courtesy.

"Alas!" he sayd; "Nowe woo is me  
That I shold cause Gawen to wed the,  
For he wol be lothe to saye naye.

(*Rag.* 303 - 5).<sup>436</sup>

Secondly, the multiple answers written in the two books represent a bureaucratic and centralising attempt to confound a serious inquiry into the mysterious. However, the court's failed attempt to take control and dismiss the significance of the threat by enclosing it within its own bureaucratic practices compel a final desperate engagement with the need to find a single, meaningful, answer. With no answer and no choice, Gawain gives his agreement without having seen Ragnelle, shrugging off the proposed marriage as negligible in relation to his fealty and loyalty to Arthur:

"Ys this alle?" then sayd Gawen;  
"I shall wed her and wed her agayn,  
Thowghe she were a fend;  
Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub"

(*Rag.* 342 - 345).

The enormity of the request is dismissed by hyperbolically overstating the case, though to ironic effect. What is immediately striking about the passage is, of course, the oblique suggestion that Ragnelle may bear some relationship to Beelzebub. At the moment of his vow Gawain, not yet having seen Ragnelle, is prepared to marry her whatever the truth behind her ambiguous ontology, being unaware of what the audience of the tale might have already come to expect: that Ragnelle's appearance is indeed a likeness imposed upon her by enchantment and that the moment of his abdicating sovereignty will be *her* moment of translation. Her ugliness is unearthly

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<sup>436</sup> cf. *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* (77 - 80).

and designed deliberately to repulse and revolt the beholder, and significantly, require her 'lover' to act against instinct and custom, since he must suspend his inclinations and the social custom and courtly convention for the sake of his fellow man - or in this case king.

The oaths and bonds made in the tale are of dizzying complexity. Hahn provides an eloquent summation:

*Ragnelle* explores the ties of chivalry through a structured repetition and variation of a fundamental pattern. This consists of a series of linked and interlocking oaths and commitments (a plotting device that distantly recalls the staggeringly complex interlacing of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight). In the first place Arthur agrees (under duress) to a compact with Sir Gromer, though Gromer claims he imposes this trial because the king had already broken an obligation to him. Arthur then agrees with Ragnelle upon a second compact which will enable him to escape the first, though its fulfilment depends entirely upon Gawain's compliance. Gawain then agrees to the terms of the second compact, thereby obligating himself to Arthur and to Ragnelle. Ragnelle fulfils her promise, providing Arthur with the knowledge that puts him out of Gromer's control (and puts Gromer in danger from Arthur and the court); Gawain fulfils his promise, marrying Ragnelle in a public ceremony and then agreeing to consummate the marriage. When Gawain, faced with what seems an impossible choice concerning Ragnelle's transformation, agrees to allow her to decide, he unwittingly fulfils the terms for setting her free from her enchantment. This outcome not only unites Ragnelle to Gawain, but to the king and queen; she then uses this amity to bring Arthur and Gromer to reconciliation.<sup>437</sup>

Gawain's vow is clearly an allegiance to the sovereignty embodied in the king, enforced by his relinquishment of sovereignty to Ragnelle as an extension of the

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<sup>437</sup> Hahn *op cit.*, p. 43.

marriage bond. But the fact that it is effectively made between three people, Arthur, Ragnelle and Gawain, complicates any easy resolution. Ragnelle bifurcates, in other words, loyalties at the court, while later effecting the resolution of the original claim by Gromer that Arthur had broken an existing bond of fealty with him. This reconciles Gromer to the court, as well as negating the claim of 'natural' sovereignty over the land for which he stands, while the more pressing matter of Ragnelle herself is determined by the relinquishment of sovereignty by Gawain, to the female, thus displacing the chaotic 'natural' woman in favour of a Christian courtly one.

Overcoming the initial attempts to confound the enquiry into Sovereignty by the court allows the transformation of Ragnelle from symbolic animal, to beautiful lady. Only by recognising the importance of the reciprocal bonds between individuals can the plot find its resolution and each individual find satisfaction. The 'marriage group' of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* can be seen in this way, as a 'vowing' group, where the problem of individual freedom is that it is limited once bonds are made with other people. Sovereignty results in the sacred marriage vow itself in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. In its prologue, Alison defers to a pagan authority, Ptolemy, to assert that men need domination by women, in order to maximise her own freedom at a personal level. The interesting thing from the point of view of the reader is that the wife is preoccupied with the idea of personal experience as 'auctoritee' (WBP 1). Ragnelle's unbending refusal to explain her meaning as anything other than 'I am no qued' (WBP 279) and Alison's constant refusal to start her tale, seen in the recurrent occupazio of 'now wol I telle forth my tale' (WBT 193), block any progression from the literal level of the narrative. Alison and Ragnelle are unwilling to loose to others the sovereignty of their own debate and terms. Failure to accept that true authority is not 'my will' but 'Thy will' at this level contests Christ's example, it instead being echoed in Gawain's courtesy toward Ragnelle. Gawain, like Christ, does not come to command, but to be subject to the conditions he finds in the world.

As a consequence, while *Ragnelle* as other 'testing' poems, questions the integrity of Arthurian excellence it does so not like the *Awentys*, 'on the exalted level of

personal honour, political justice, chivalric service of women, and charity, but on the antithetical and ridiculous level of such things as bonding and furtive breaches of contract.’<sup>438</sup>

#### 4. 2 (b) Whate is your meanyng?

In *Ragnelle* these conventions are enacted within a hostile context whose modulation to the level of oaths and impossible choices is dependent upon the figure of Ragnelle herself. The convention of testing, magnified by the exploration of the meaning and confines of the oath, are initially translated to the world of the wood, the ‘straunge contrey’ where the honour, justice and chivalry of the court may not be recognised and are therefore arbitrary. But the oaths resolve with the fulfilment of the terms which set Ragnelle free from her enchantment, and end with everyone established in her or his ‘proper’ place, and with courtesy restored to Arthur’s court’s customary consolidation and hierarchy.

What is initially incongruous in the character of Ragnelle is her ugliness and profound ambiguity, for which there seems to be no immediate need: surely a ‘normal’ woman would suffice, and the unity of the plot be maintained? Ragnelle’s femaleness is an important element in the text. While Catherine Belsey argues that the human subject is under constant construction in the early modern period, but that this process does not include women,<sup>439</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto suggests otherwise, and that this ‘construction’ of identity is far earlier, though no less involved in the definition of patriarchy. She observes that wild-women such as Saint Mary of Egypt go against normative versions of the courtly woman, and that indeed gender difference and identification are constituted by the acquiescent courtly woman who conforms to a male ideal. ‘The desirable woman of the romances has a white, soft body, its smooth,

<sup>438</sup> Shepherd *op cit.*, p. 379.

<sup>439</sup> Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: an Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England* (New York: Methuen, 1985) p. ix.

caressable surface a metaphor for its uncontested appropriation by the hero. When that surface is broken, the result is not wildness, or the irruption of animal features, but a loss of specularity – the woman no longer reflects back these qualities which both sign her femaleness and substantiate male identity.<sup>440</sup> For Yamamoto, the wild female has to be reconstructed by another male – a chivalric male identity – before she can be established in a ‘right’ relationship. Female wildness is, therefore, constrained by the bias of both gendered representations, while concurrently defining the *human* – an intermediary between culture and nature.

Aguirre has suggested that the beautiful woman figure is a representation of sovereignty itself, and acts as a justification of the righteousness of kingship. From the perspective of an Irish analogue, *Silva Gadelica*, he argues that the figure of the ‘natural’ woman or loathly lady represents the land, who moves with cycles and seasons and must consort and have sexual liaison in order to renew, and at the same time be rejuvenated by Truth.<sup>441</sup> She is the bestower of royal power, her ‘hand’ guaranteeing the kingdom, which in *Ragnelle* would be at the expense of Gromer. In this way the natural is appropriated into the realm of the court. In the *Silva Gadelica*, the Irish woman changes form to a loathly woman when without her proper or correct spouse as a symbol for a land which, in turmoil, has lost its fruitfulness and prosperity according to its gain or loss of a true and rightful king.<sup>442</sup> By this reading, sovereignty in *Ragnelle* is in the balance because of the challenge from natural law, as laid down by Gromer. Only once sovereignty has been established as Arthur’s by the fulfilment of the vow and the acquiescence of domestic sovereignty to Ragnelle by Gawain, may the land be relinquished to Arthur’s authority and the realm of the courtly. In this way the rule of mankind’s natural, animalistic tendencies are negated by a divinely appointed temporal sovereignty, mirrored in turn by sovereignty as the domestic rule within marriage. Thus Middle English descendant ‘versions’ of the *Silva Gadelica*, such as *Ragnelle*, take the figure of woman ‘out of the field of land – symbolism and relegated to the (more literal) domestic sphere: Sovereignty over land

<sup>440</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto 2000 *op cit.*, pp. 199 - 200.

<sup>441</sup> *Silva Gadelica*, ed. and trans. by Standish O’Grady (London: William & Norgate, 1892) pp. 368 - 73) cited by Aguirre pp. 272 - 279.

<sup>442</sup> Aguirre *op cit.*, p. 274

is being displaced in favour of Sovereignty in love' and the land issue ascribed to the court, and Arthur.<sup>443</sup>

Of course, *Ragnelle* can successfully be read in these terms, though there is an obvious departure in the way the encounter with strangeness is accentuated in a particularly visually way, and the description of Ragnelle clearly something more than Aguirre's analogue would suggest. Why is so much hyperbole effected in descriptions of her - so much time spent on the specific detail of her appearance?:

Her face was red, her nose snotyde withalle,  
 Her mowithe wyde, her tethe yalowe overe alle,  
 With bleryd eyen gretter then a balle.  
 Her mowithe was nott to lak:  
 Her tethe hyng overe her lyppes,  
 Her chekys syde as wemens hippes  
 A lute she bare upon her bak;  
 Her nek long and therto greatt;  
 Her here cloteryd on an hepe;  
 In the sholders she was a yard brode.  
 Hangyng pappys to be an hors lode,  
 And lyke a barele she was made.  
 And to reherse the fowlnesse of that Lady,  
 Ther is no tung may telle, securly;  
 Of lothynesse inowghe she had.

(*Rag.* 231-245).

Her very existence is a contradiction. As the *puella senilis* of E. R. Curtius she is young and old, fair and loathly, a being standing outside the categories of human reality. Like the personification of Philosophy who appears to Boethius as a dignified matron, full of vitality, though ancient, and on a supernatural level, Ragnelle

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<sup>443</sup> Aguirre *op cit.*, p. 279.



personifies the animal aspects of a human being. But also like Curtius' *puella senilis* who could be a projection of the unconscious, Ragnelle represents the animal Other who has always to come from the self, being at once recognisably the same though distinctly different.<sup>444</sup> In this sense one thing exists only by virtue of its opposite. A de-humanised human, she is hunch-backed with matted hair, over-sized breasts and is shaped like a barrel - a picture of 'lothynesse'. But she is also richly arrayed with gold and precious stones which make her an incongruous 'unsemely syghte' (246). The collocation of the two aspects of her appearance combine to produce a character who is deeply ambiguous, in that it is uncertain how she should be treated.

While Arthur maintains courtesy toward her and addresses her as 'lady' she also demonstrates that she is not, in her pre-transformed state, any such thing: 'And ther he [Arthur] met with a Lady. / She was as ungoodly a creature / As ever man sawe' (*Rag.* 227 - 229). Though unusual her signification seems clear: we should read Ragnelle and be prepared to be moved by her as both a human woman and, metaphorically, as an animal. The image is all important here for verbal, rational discourse is diluted by the optical, and in the process we must interpret rather than evaluate its meaning at a merely social level. In fact she is a woman who quite literally embodies the most animalistic characteristics of humankind, her uncontrollable tendencies manifesting a disregard for the value placed on courteous and demure demeanour by the court. The text makes it clear that Ragnelle is Christian, attending mass and 'Churche' (*Rag.* 587), so she is not wholly animal, being in possession of Christian reason and having the capacity of the spiritual, albeit contained within a carnal, deathly body.<sup>445</sup> There is clearly a distinction to be made here in that Ragnelle is not in actuality an animal, nor merely a literal sense

<sup>444</sup> Curtius *op cit.*, pp. 101 - 105.

<sup>445</sup> Cf., '*Infelix ego homo! Quis me liberabit de corpore mortis huius?*' [O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?] (Rom. 7.24). The idea that the Jews, for example, were thought to be animals because they could not understand, or would not accept, the idea of the trinity and could not, therefore, use reason, is expounded by Peter Abelard (1079 - 1142?) in his *Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*. In his discussion with the Christian, the philosopher is allowed to insult the Jews twice, as 'sensual' 'animals' who believe on the basis of 'external' miracles and signs rather than 'reasons' [154, 157] and the Christian compares the Jew to 'an illiterate person' [358] who attends to the literal rather than the mystical or allegorical sense of scripture. Peter Abelard, *Ethical Writings: Ethics and Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, trans. by Paul Vincent Spade (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 1995).

exposition of the taxonomic, symbolic meaning of an animal type. This would present a didactic natural sign, but go little further to explaining her role within the economy of the tale. Rather, in being compared to an animal, a hybridised monster who defies category, it is the carnal tendencies and attributes of the human body which suggest its animality, that are to be criticised. David Williams notes that:

‘As Isidore perceived, the most useful model for a taxonomy of the monster is the human body ... the human body through its symbolic extensions as well as its physical structure, provides the most complete paradigm for order and thus for the disorder that has precedence and priority in the monstrous configuration of reality.’<sup>446</sup>

In this way the animal image is an attack on human animal tendencies. While she is a woman, she is also a monstrous version of one who threatens to break from her human boundaries. Like the fear of hybridisation inherent in *De proprietatibus rerum*’s wonder animals, the figure of Ragnelle, metaphorically speaking, presents a hybrid human whose animal characteristics are inherently human ones.

Ragnelle is not described as an animal in any generic sense, however, but specifically as a carnivorous predator and a boar, whose ‘tethe hyng overe her lyppes’ (*Rag.* 235). Drawing on Bakhtin’s analysis of the body as metaphor in *Rabelais and his World*, Dorothy Yamamoto has suggested that different sorts of bodies presuppose different sorts of demeanour *vis-à-vis* the world. The hallmark of knightliness is *measure*, inward restraint, imposed by individual reason, which results in a virtuous life. The ‘uncourtly other’ on the other hand has a lack of self-control, rudeness and churlishness, against which chivalric courtliness is ‘pitched’.<sup>447</sup> The sow / boar image is developed explicitly throughout the text, though most vividly at Gawain and Ragnelle’s first meeting, suggesting that we should see her through the eyes of the man who *must* marry her, and who himself typifies this *measure*:

<sup>446</sup> David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (London: University of Exeter Press, 1996) p. 108.

<sup>447</sup> Yamamoto 2000 *op cit.*, p. 171.

She had two tethe on every syde  
 As borys tuskes, I wolfe nott hyde,  
 Of lengthe a large handfulle.

...

The one tusk went up and the other down.

(*Rag.* 548 - 551).

At a taxonomic level, the description of Ragnelle as a boar, though remarkable, is complicated by her clothing which in itself does not detract from her figurative representation as an animal. But in addition to clothing she is adorned with jewels. At Arthur's first meeting with Ragnelle the description of her precious stones and gold is striking:

With gold besett and many a precious stone  
 Ther was an unseemly syghte:  
 So fowlle a creature without mesure  
 To ryde so gayly, I you ensure,  
 Ytt was no reason ne ryghte.

(*Rag.* 247 - 252).

The poet-narrator considers it neither proper nor right that she rides 'gayly' and is apparently unaware of how incongruous she looks. To stress the point the description of her finery is repeated at the wedding scene: 'Her arayment was worthe thre thowsand mark / Of good red nobles, styff and stark' (*Rag.* 592 - 593) with the addition of its monetary value being stated. This is juxtaposed with her being described similarly to a 'sowe':

For alle her rayment, she bare the belle

Of fowlnesse, that evere I hard telle –  
 So fowlle a sowe sawe nevere man.

(*Rag.* 595).

Like the Boethian taxonomy in which animals are classified by the character traits, and which also correspond to mankind's morally reprehensible traits, the text's literal sense provides the instantly recognisable human type whose correlative is the pig and its lust, or as Boethius describes it 'wallowing in foul and impure lusts ... occupied by the filthy pleasures of a sow.' But the additional description of the golden array, suggests that beneath this outward splendour is a typological correlation with the biblical proverb that '*circulus aureus in naribus suis mulier pulchra et fatua*' (Prov. 11. 22). As a gold ring in a snout, we are told, so is a fair woman who is without discretion.<sup>448</sup> While the proverbial similitude between women without discretion and swine sits comfortably within *Ragnelle*'s thematic imagery it also appears as a common *topos* when addressing the topic of female lechery and its associative correspondence with carnal lust. In both Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Parson's Tale* the proverb serves to provide a direct analogy between swine and lecherous humanity. Jankyn, lecturing Alison declares that ' "A fair womman, but she be chaast also, Is lyke a gold ryng in a sowes nose" ' (WBP 784 - 785). The Parson, quotes the same proverb of Solomon, 'a fair womman that is a fool of hire body lyk to a ryng of gold that were in the groyn of a soughe, ... for right as a soughe wroteth in everich ordure, so wroteth she hire beautee in the stynkyng ordure of syne (ParsT 155 - 156). Reversion to thoughtless acts of sex, motivated by 'animal' lusts, the proverb instructs, will result in the animal within dominating the life of the Christian subject. In this sense *Ragnelle*'s similitude to the boar or sow presents to the court a mirror of the lustful animal reality beneath the trappings of its noble *appearance* – which is transcendable only by virtue: '*Mulierem fortem quis inveniet? procul et de ultimis finibus pretium eius*', the price of a virtuous woman cannot be counted in jewels, says the proverb (Prov. 31. 10).

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<sup>448</sup> Solomon is a particularly apt example because he typologically pre-empts Christ as a Judge who shows mercy in the temporal context, thus mirroring the ontological parallel in heaven: justice and mercy on earth imitate the divine plan.

There is also an ecclesiastical and theological connection between hunting and the boar. Boar hunting, as described in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, was a royal if dangerous sport. In both the context of the hunt and in terms of her ambiguous ontological origin, Ragnelle may be seen as a dangerously demonic or possessed figure, especially as she is as she is by the enchantment of her stepmother. Regarded as the most unclean and the most abhorred of all animals [Lev. 11. 7; Isa. 65. 4; 66. 3; 65. 17; Luke 15. 15] swine get a poor deal in The Bible. Christ exorcises demons which possess a man, forcing them into a herd of swine: '*exierunt ergo daemonia ab homine, et intraverunt in porcos; et impetu abiit grex per praeceptum in stagnum, et suffocatus est*' [Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were drowned] (Luke 8. 33). If this is not immediately striking as an analogue, Beryl Rowland provides a link when she observes the popular image of a hunting churchman. 'Early in English sculpture the hunter as priest is seen in pursuit of the boar.'<sup>449</sup> Given the dependence on these scriptural images and meanings the irony that we should note is, of course, that this is unambiguously prohibited by scripture: '*sus quoque, quoniam dividit ungulam et non ruminat, imunda erit: carnibus eorum non vescemini, et cadavera non tangetis*', Also the swine is unclean for you, says the book of Deuteronomy, because it has cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud (Deut. 14. 8). The hunt, then, may be seen as the prelude to exorcising and transforming Ragnelle, who embodies an 'unclean' form, by bringing her within the bounds of the court by the acts of a worthy Christian subject.

Like the boar too, Ragnelle's gluttony brands her as an outsider at court who is at least of low estate, if not wildly monstrous: 'She ete as moche as six that ther wore' (*Rag.* 605). Taxonomically, the swinish gluttony of her 'animal' type thus enforces this similitude with lecherous humanity in that she is a sexual predator. 'Shewe me your cortesy in bed' (*Rag.* 630), she says to Gawain on their wedding night. Ragnelle, as a 'Lady', is aligned with the animal in the two sets of antithesis employed here:

<sup>449</sup> See Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World*, (Toronto: Kent State University Press, 1971) p. 98.

man / woman, and man / animal. Gawain has to deal conjugally with her as a woman and wife, while satisfying a human lust deployed and symbolised in animalistic form. Dante in the *Inferno* (XXX, 22 - 34) compares Gianni Schicchi to a hog which attacks Capocchio; it is not the wild boar or demonical swine but the domesticated hog which when liberated from the sty, seizes upon anything which may satisfy its desire. In the same way the sense of desire and expectation displayed by Ragnelle's animal appetite creates tension and anxiety about the wedding night, after which Arthur poses to his court what is both a serious question (given her unnatural, 'unknown' nature) and a humorous one: "Syr, quod the Kyng, "lett us go and asaye / Yf sir Gawen be on lyve." ' (*Rag.* 722 - 723). In this sense the question of what women most desire, and the very use of the word 'desire', underpins the question with a sexual subtext and emerges as part of the answer: 'Also we love to have lust in bed' (*Rag.* 411). But the moral and all encompassing answer, that women most desire 'sovereynté' over men (*Rag.* 423, 425, 429, 468) would seem to both confirm Ragnelle's sexually predatory nature, and the uncontrollable nature of human sexual relations. It is not just Ragnelle, who has a predatory, animal element as one aspect of her nature, but all humankind, necessarily involved as it is with its animal nature. Once re-embodied as a courtly beauty, and no longer in the semblance of an animal, Ragnelle's predation is no longer visibly open to scrutiny. In this way Sovereignty in *Ragnelle* takes on the meaning of sexual dominion, in its most animal sense, and transfigures it to become dominion in love, thus neutralising 'lust' by placing it in the court as visible evidence of the power of civility to transform the other. Courtly fictions demonstrate this movement as an operation in which the other is incorporated into the service of chivalric sovereignty and courtesy by reorienting and suppressing its desires.

It is essential that the accretive animal imagery which surrounds the figure of Ragnelle is consistently visible and that she be always seen as a woman.<sup>450</sup> This

<sup>450</sup> The animal imagery and beastly behaviour which we come to associate with Ragnelle is both accretive and allegorical. She is always a woman; but like all human beings she is always an animal too. In addition to the poet-narrator's emphasis on the boarish aspects of her personality, in referring to herself as a lady and emphasising the importance of a name, another set of allusion are evoked.

"now farewelle," sayd the Kyng, "Lady."

"Ye, Sir," she sayd, "ther is a byrd men calle an owlle ...

allows the animal / human comparison to highlight lust as a potential pitfall to the court's integrity. The animal in man should be repressed, but can only be so once allowed to emerge. Once evident it is against the animal that the ideology of the courtly may be defined. While this *seems* to set human and animal in antithesis, human nature is not in itself antithetical. Rather, human animality must always remain a lower term, must constantly be negated and suppressed. To borrow the psychoanalytic use of the term, this means that the animal is brought to the surface of the text's 'social consciousness' as exemplified by the court, only to be repudiated. Guinever's attempt to bridle Ragnelle away from view and acknowledgement are seen in her request that the marriage be a private affair.

The Queen prayed Dame Ragnelle sekerly -

"To be maryed in the morning erly,

As pryvaly as ye may."

(*Rag.* 569 - 571).

Ragnelle refuses. The bond made with Arthur is a public affair, and must be openly acknowledged and enacted by the proper ceremony. The shame of the court and humiliation of Gawain anticipates the way in which the significance of the oath has been misunderstood, as has Ragnelle. Arthur's questions 'What mean you, Lady?' (*Rag.* 270) and 'Whate is your meanyng?' (*Rag.* 275) anticipate Gawain's question to Ragnelle 'what ar ye?' (*Rag.* 644) at his astonished witnessing of her transformation,

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And yett a Lady I am." (*Rag.* 315 - 317)

Evidently aware that there may be some confusion about the identity of *what she is*, she clarifies for Arthur that she is indeed a 'Lady', though this is only an elements of *what she means*. In the process she also points out that even an owl has a mate ' "No force, Sir Kyng, thoughe I be foulle: Choyce for make hathe an owlle" ' (*Rag.* 309 - 310) thereby drawing a comparison which has negative connotations from death and evil, to stupidity and sloth. There is sense in which the thematic focus on sovereignty is maintained by this allusion. The owl is identified with the Jews who prefer the darkness of ignorance to the light brought by Christ, saying 'We have no king but Caesar, we know not who this man is' (John 19. 15). For a full discussion see Mariko Miyazaki, 'Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-semitism' In Debra Hassig, ed., *The Mark of the Beast, The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999) p. 27. Hugh of Fouilloys's *De avibus*, according to Miyazaki, reverses this symbolism, and 'compares the bird's habit of shunning the light to Christ, who desires to convert sinners' (Miyazaki 27). The allusion to the owl then, would emphasise Ragnelle's role as tester and revealer. Bartholomaeus Anglicus' literal sense exposition of *De babone* provides an interesting analogue. The Owl is a sinful bird and bad portend who is full of 'slouþ': 'he bodeþ yuel, for þey telleþ þat 3if þe owle is iset in a citee hit bodeþ destroccioun and waast,' in addition the 'crienge of þe owle by ny3te bodeþ deþ, as dyuynours conectiþ and gessip'. *DPR*, 12. 6.

which itself echoes the ‘whate [do] wemen desyren most’ of line 406. Gawain, faced with the question of whether he wants Ragnelle to be fair by day and ugly by night or vice versa, or in fact, an animal for one part of the day and a woman for the rest, is perplexed, and responds that he can only act according to the wedding bond as he now belongs to Ragnelle.

Lose me when ye lyst, for I am bond;  
 I putt the choyse in you.  
 Bothe body and goodes, hartt, and every dele,  
 Ys alle your oun, for to by and sele –  
 That make I God avowe!

(*Rag.* 681 - 685).

But it is Ragnelle’s observation that unless he had fulfilled his bond she would have been otherwise understood, which enables any retrospection on the nature of the bond and its importance in rising above a merely animal nature to the courtly and its spiritual aspiration. Gawain could easily have opted for the beautiful-by-night option, and she would always have been publicly understood as the animalistic version of her self:

I shold have bene *oderwyse understood*,  
 Evyn tylle the best of Englund  
 Had wedyd me verament,  
 And also shold give me the sovereynté  
 Of all his body and goodes, sycurly.

(*Rag.* 694 - 698, my emphasis).

Until married and given total sovereignty over him, thus fulfilling the oath to Arthur and the bond of marriage, she would always have been understood as the other of her real self. Truth to the bond, right thought and right action, repress animal characteristics and negate the magic by which Ragnelle was transformed and the



animal revealed. Thus Ragnelle's similitude with the animal can be seen as a didactic expression of the post-lapsarian descent toward the animal, which is resisted by aspiring to be like God, typified in the chivalric ideals of the court.<sup>451</sup> The text, in other words, is deeply engaged with the production of a disruptive, animal other who tests courtly values in order to assert the superiority of the court. This disruption, always within, was evoked to create a series of problems in order to effect their resolution.

Gawain's vow to wed Ragnelle out of friendship and fealty to Arthur give precedence to the motive of chivalric loyalty over romantic personal love. But in *Ragnelle* the woman serves as an intermediate term in the bonds between chivalric men: 'Arthur's request to Gawain was not valid; on the other hand, Gromer's lands are effectively taken from him by his sister Ragnelle, and lawfully assigned by her to Gawain as a result of his marriage pledge. In a significantly obscured way, she is indeed Sovereignty, the power that dispenses territorial rule'.<sup>452</sup> This rule is legitimate only by virtue of Gawain's Christian virtue in keeping a vow which is an approved, prescribed antidote to the carnal, and which in the process allows Ragnelle to transcend her own ill-fitting reality and enter the realm of the courtly ideal. Adherence to the codes of chivalric virtues and significantly, the marriage itself, is clearly a remedy against lechery.<sup>453</sup> Gawain explains to Arthur: 'Lo, this is my repayre!' (*Rag.* 744) which is not just his rest, but his repayment for the virtue of keeping the bond between Arthur and Ragnelle, whatever the cost: 'for I am bond; / I putt the choyce in you.' (*Rag.* 680 - 681). 'The force of civility and courtesy prevails,

<sup>451</sup> Though in essentials, spiritually and morally, Ragnelle is no different, her visual transformation into a beautiful lady and the marriage vow Gawain and she have made seem to negate any criticism of desire, allowing the resolution of the final scenario in which their marriage is consummated. If the proverbs which seem to underpin the tale are to be taken seriously, though, the ending may not be entirely positive. 'But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: *'Contigit enim eis illud veri proverbii: Canis reversus ad suum vomitum, et: Sus lota in volutabro luti'* ["A dog returns to his own vomit" and, a sow having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'] of II Peter 2. 22, which draws on Proverbs 26. 11, *'Sicut canis qui revertitur ad vomitum suum, sic imprudens qui iterat stultitiam suam'* [As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly] might suggest that 'animal' desire is never really overcome, and may only be made legitimate by the marriage vow and the aspiration to marriage as a spiritual ideal. Gawain, purified by his truth to the oath, and Ragnelle, made 'clean' of her animal appearance and sexual predation, may now indulge the carnal act within the Christian 'state' of marriage.

<sup>452</sup> Aguirre *op cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>453</sup> Cf., marriage as a remedy against lechery in Chaucer's *The Parson's Tale*, 917 - 43.

and the challenge of the wild is answered within the safe precincts of bedroom and court at the conclusion.<sup>454</sup>

#### 4. 2 (c) summary

The reward for courtesy can be read in the presentation to Gawain of an ideal woman: but there is a sense in which he maintains his moral hegemony over his own animal self and in the process breaks the spell of Ragnelle's alternative self. In this way what is represented in *Ragnelle* is a hermeneutic perspective of cyclical interpretation: each analysis of the animal discovers what the beginning perspective demands; in this case the innate ideological values laid out in the text demand a statement of what courtly individuals are not (*I am like that, but it is not what I aspire to*). Gawain neutralises the supernatural aspects of the tale which allow the test to occur. Disruptive female desire, allegorically embodied in Ragnelle as both animal, sexual predator, and subject of enchantment, is repressed by Gawain's innate courtesy. The repressed animal erupts, threatens, is suppressed, precisely because the dominant ideological position cannot be undermined or subverted – only revealed in the practice of upholding its dominance by showing what it is *not*. At a didactic level, the figure of Ragnelle draws on a specific animal typologically, authorised by allusion to scripture which highlights the dangers of digressing from reason: 'he who abandons goodness and ceases to be a man cannot rise to the status of God, and so is transformed into an animal' says Boethius, without making the distinction that at the literal level at least, he already *is*.

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<sup>454</sup> Hahn *op cit.*, p. 44.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the way the animal in fictive medieval texts is used as a moral arbiter, yet is displaced from moral consideration by early Christianity. The fundamental difference between the theology and literature, is clearly literature's availability to theorise positions established in Christian doctrine. Methodologically, the thesis opens up a discourse concerning consistent theological attitudes and patterns, which devalue the importance of the animal in western, and more specifically Christian, thought. In particular, the way that doctrinal interpretation displaces rigorous examination of the animal to the fictional text, is evident in a broad range of material. This pattern of displacement begins with conflicting readings of creation, characterised by Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Animal Food*. Porphyry is an important figure whose philosophy is integral to Christianity's appropriation of Hellenic reason. His non-dualistic and anti-Gnostic thought, has considerable parity with Christian doctrine, yet his concern that animals have inherent value as subjects of the creator, also embodying His attributes, is devalued in Christian thought. Porphyry highlights conflicting stylistic differences in the way the world and the text may be interpreted, and reveals the way that thought about the position of the animal in creation is developed through an ideology predisposed to reject a theocentric understanding of creation, in which God is present, and imminently revealed through all his animals.

It is too big an 'if' to say that, were his thought on animals canonical, western attitudes to the animal would be different. But the exclusion of his animal philosophy from Christian thought leaves a noticeable gap in theology, which is only really addressed with the advent of Darwinism. This noticeable imbalance is, to some extent, redressed by literary explorations of the animal, where man is defined against it, and where it becomes important as a sign, understood in abstraction, though never

really granted moral status or consideration. The animal, rather, is forced to conform to what man *says* it is.

The second chapter's focus on Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *DPR* reveals the difference between the outward looking Neoplatonic position of Porphyry, and the closed matrix of interpretation of early scholastic thought on the animal. The animal is subject to the predetermined answers supplied by Christian doctrine. Animals are a utility, not merely in their material usage, but in the way that they are used as literary signs. The examination of the way that Aristotelian structures and Christian hierarchies are synthesised demonstrates the way in which the animal is anomalously placed, and impossible to read from a single perspective. Aristotle's universals, as a mode of physiological categorisation, tend to be negated when particular Christian meanings are bestowed upon the animals as metaphysical expressions of ontological truth. The reality of a particular animal ceases to have primary importance in relation to the potential truth that it speaks about its Creator. The 'idea' that the animal is said to embody, is placed above the animal itself, the realm of potential being placed higher than the realm of the actual. Indeed, in Augustine's thought the animal, as a material sign, is devalued as a literal and material thing. Rather, priority is given to spiritual metaphors which open up new angles of vision. Such *logocentricity* prioritises mankind in such a way that the moral 'meaning' of an animal may only exist in abstraction from the material, where Christian conceptions of their significance bestow importance upon them, though in turn, such importance only exists in relation to what they can offer to man's own knowledge of himself, and God.

The focus on Augustine's sign theory in the third chapter developed the notion that material things are fallen signs, yet demonstrates that this is also inherently problematic for Christian thought. Augustine sees the totality of creation as fallen, so that man is dependent upon faith and the *logos* which allows him to see through the corrupted things of the world. But there is also a sense in which the created totality remains intact, while human perspectives, because of human free-will and moral agency, are fallen.

This is most immediately evident in the way that Aquinas rethinks the way that the animal had a purpose, a design which it maintains, and which allows man to utilise it, and learn from it. His argument from design is complementary to, and compatible with, the way that he sees creation as being in a sense fallen *within* man.

At the 'divine' level of interpretation the crucial question is, how far such scholastic theories may properly be described as theocentric? Ultimately, of course they are. A God of all beings is, by definition, the centre of the universe and present in all its things; anagogically, nothing has existence outside his essence. This constitutes the most ineluctable difference between Christian theory and Muslim theories. In any comparative consideration 'theocentricity' stands on the distinctive side of the equations. Langland's idealised vision of the earth as a theocentric one, presents the animal as having an important ontological significance. This is clearly influenced by Augustinian thought, where on the one hand God is present in the world, but on the other, all material things are fallen and corrupted. The two are not incompatible, but require us to understand that there are two distinct levels of interpretation: the contingent perspective, in which God's presence in the world is vaguely signified, and the absolute perspective, in which a *logocentric* illumination operates through faith. Augustine, of course, privileges the later, and devalues the animal.

Henryson's fables highlight the condition of man as an animal in the corporeal context, by highlighting the similarity between the two to illustrate the moral problems that arise from man's existence in his corporeal context. This generates considerable irony, of which Henryson seems unaware. He educates 'be figure of an uther thing.' 'figure', rhetorically, means that he uses figures of speech to suggest ideas. In the *Morall Fabillis* he makes beasts appear to speak and understand. Because they share the animal part of our soul, but do not share the higher, rational component reserved for humanity, they provide ideal analogies to the human state. Henryson's teaching method unequivocally involves the representation of animals behaving, as some humans, in elevated or noble ways, and with the benefit of self knowledge and

awareness. Ultimately Henryson's animals are nothing more than the mobilisation of a set of rhetorical devices, or in his own words 'Fein3eit fabilis' which 'Ane sillogisme propone.' (Prologue, 1, 3, 46) But as such, these rhetorical animals inhabit many borders; of imaginative art where the actual animal is irrelevant compared to its potential symbolic counterpart, as well as the borders of the human, and the rational. At the indistinct limits of doctrinal thought, the animal finds its habitat, serving to express in a practical context what the 'official' texts of Augustine and Aquinas may not. It urges man to understand that the humanity of their animality, as distinct from the beast of the literal, is a far more deadly beast involving as it does their fallenness and subsequent personal choice. Ironically, though, and despite such constant comparisons in which the human is asked to empathise with the state of being animal, the purpose of the fable is primarily to turn man from his animal nature, and from the animal *per se*. Doctrinally, the comparison is made, and worked – out in a literary context, which suggest that what is learnt should be taken out and practised in the world. In this sense animals provide an arbiter for man's reflection upon himself, though then ironically, he distances it, and depreciates its importance.

In the final chapter such representations can be seen to be inverted. While fables make animals behave like men, human characters in romances behave like animals. Such literary examinations of the animality of man are set against Christian ideals in a courtly context, which prescribe how man may transcend his animality. The reward for Gawain's courtesy, for example, is the presentation to him of an ideal woman – not a bestial one. Throughout *Ragnelle*, there is a sense in which, having recognised it, he maintains his moral hegemony over his own animal self, and in the process breaks the spell of Ragnelle's alternative, animal self. It is clearly an allegorised version of the doctrinal commonplace of comparing man and animal, though in such allegories, the beast within threatens to emerge if the prescribed ideals of Christian aspiration are not closely adhered to. In this way what is represented in *Ragnelle*, is a hermeneutic perspective of cyclical interpretation: each analysis of the animal discovers what the beginning perspective demands; in this case the innate ideological values laid out in the text demand a statement of what courtly individuals are not (*I*

*am like that, but it is not what I aspire to*). The repressed animal erupts and is suppressed, precisely because the dominant ideological position cannot be undermined or subverted. It may only be revealed in the practice of upholding its dominance by showing what it is *not*.

The strength of the thesis lies in the way it observes that generally speaking, medieval men were very good at informing their audience what to believe. They were very confident about their knowledge; but they rarely question the validity of that knowledge. From a modern perspective human beings are privileged to be able to see animals against a much wider background. They may, if they chose, challenge the mistaken supposition that the animal does not really matter, and understand that our attitudes to it come from confused outlooks and inherited truisms. I set out to show that what we understand by the medieval view of scripture and doctrine, sounds suspiciously like the interpretation of two men - namely Augustine and Aquinas. Clearly, their interpretations constitute a discourse of exclusion – often on tenuous scriptural evidence.

Medieval thought is far too comprehensive convincingly to close off the moral questions which the animal presents to it. Doctrine may prescribe simplistic solutions, but again, doctrine is interpretative. In contrast to the notion of dominion God's covenants confound the idea of a world created solely for the benefit of man. Such theocentricity sits uncomfortably with the idea of dominion. While the covenant tradition encompasses all of God's creation, the testaments, gospels and injunctions that litter Christian scripture, are ignored, or repressed, and remain uncited by theologians and clerics. So often writers, commentators, and laymen, base their arguments on the supposition that 'God gave us dominion'. Such a statement must be modified, and seen in relation to scripture as a larger body of spiritual wisdom. If we are going to insist on such literalism, we must include the injunction to open our mouths for the dumb, for all those appointed to destruction, and that God brings salvation to man and animal alike. He remembers the covenant which is between Himself and man and every living creature of all flesh not to bring further retribution

after the flood. But He promises all animals that he will abolish slaughter, bring safety, and bring them to Him. The fact is that the real significance of God's covenant and relationship with the animal has been either actively dismissed and censored in the interests of promoting human interests, or is merely overlooked as irrelevant to Christian thought.

In the literary use of animals in medieval literature, exposition of man's relationship to the beast complicates rather than simplifies the way the animal is understood. Characteristically, medieval literary theory provides a comprehensive hermeneutic system of reading, where all things may be explained at one or more levels of thought. Despite such a sophisticated approach to understanding the things of the world, the animal is outstandingly difficult to define and place, unless it is over-simplistically used as a defining Other to human selves.

The model of the world which forms western thought and attitudes to the animal is open to question, and we should constantly scrutinise the platitudes about animals that we have received from the medieval paradigm. This thesis has shown that it is no longer acceptable that we believe the one or two truisms, extracted from the plethora of conflicting material, which have defined the animal over the last two millennia.



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## APPENDIX A

## CONSTANTINE'S SPONSORSHIP OF CHRISTIANITY

The historical context of the synthesis of Christianity with Rome strongly suggests that what is, in part at least, a vegetarian religion is forced to conform to the sacrificial meat - eating empire into which it is assimilated.<sup>389</sup> The formation of the biblical canon has been seen by many critics as a politically expedient act of censorship and control, reflecting the way in which early Christianity was manipulated, and shoehorned into existing cultural practices. The most recent work to discuss the effects of the fusion of Christianity with Rome is Charles Freeman's *The Closing of the Western Mind*. Freeman examines the way in which Hellenistic reason is suppressed, as Christianity becomes a state religion, and emphasises the way in which unauthorised interpretations of early Christianity become heretical after scriptural canon formation at the first council of Nicaea. On the one hand, this may be seen as the result of religious toleration and a free – market in which Rome's commercial attitudes to buying citizenship, slave labour, and justice extends to the commodification of the Christian product:

... the religions of the Graeco-Roman world were primarily, and traditionally civic; this is to say that the Gods were the gods who were recognised by the state – either the Roman state or the local city state. The priesthoods were reserved, in most instances, for the more prominent citizens, and at Rome the emperor himself expressed his religious function in the role of pontifex Maximus.<sup>390</sup>

<sup>389</sup> For a discussion on early Christian vegetarian sects and their directives, see Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1982) p. 104 ff.

<sup>390</sup> R. M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Collins Press, 1963) p. 249.

There is also a sense in which Christianity comes to prominence as a means of establishing power, control, and political unification. In the first and second centuries, the Roman Empire was a cauldron of religious belief in which Christians vied for position with Hellenic religious groups such as Neoplatonism. In AD 250, the Emperor Decius launched a persecution of Christians, in part because 'the Christians refused to worship the emperor, met in secret, and so seemed to an empire undergoing civil wars, invasions, and other calamities to be practically subversive.'<sup>391</sup> Christians are seen as dissident to the officially sanctioned religion, embodied in the Roman Emperor as Pontifex Maximus. By 312 Constantine, who was emperor in the East, decided to take total control of the empire by defeating Maxentius, emperor in the West and who was seen to have presided over the decline and 'misfortunes of the empire.'<sup>392</sup> After crossing the Alps with a small army, he reached the outskirts of Rome, apparently having seen a vision of the cross standing above the sun (which he reported himself, therefore mythologising a self-fulfilling prophesy). 'On the cross were the words "by this conquer." Christ appeared to him and told him to place this icon on a military standard.'<sup>393</sup> Ironically this later proved problematic for Constantine who, assuming a militaristic aspect to Christianity which did not exist, had then to promote images of Christ as a conquering soldier, though as Charles Freeman points out the image itself was particularly inappropriate given that Christ was crucified by Roman soldiers as an enemy of Rome. Such military and pseudo doctrinal propaganda has, of course, no foundation in scripture and is a tool of state. In contrast the plethora of apocryphal material in which Christ is explicitly sent to abolish sacrifice is repressed, burnt, or seen as heretical.<sup>394</sup> Such historical occurrences are not only defined by an arbitrary event, but instantly become a material icon: the intersection of a multiple of factors are solidified in the historical moment. The chance emergence of these events is not calculated, but rather facilitates one discourse: that of Constantine's move to seize a political power and 'become' deified. It just happened that he had chosen to favour one god above others from

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<sup>391</sup> N. Downs, ed., *Basic Documents in Medieval History* (Toronto: Princeton University Press, 1959) p. 13.

<sup>392</sup> A. H. M. Jones, *Constantine and the conversion of Europe* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948) p. 3.

<sup>393</sup> R. M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Trust of the Christian Movement into the Roman World* (London: Collins, 1971) p. 266.

<sup>394</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, pp. 178 - 180.

whom he sought patronage in the hope of securing a favourable outcome to his campaign. On October 27<sup>th</sup> 312 after the battle of the Milvian Bridge Rome welcomed Constantine who claimed to be restoring the Roman senate and people to freedom: 'He was sole ruler in the west, while Licinius, now his ally, ruled eastern Europe. His victory had been due to the power of Christ'.<sup>395</sup> In what sense it was due to the power of Christ has never been in question for the Catholic Church, though recent appraisals see Constantine's vision as remarkably convenient. From a modern critical perspective Claire Colebrook states that 'stories, as much as weapons, can become the physical acts which enable acts of power to take place. Stories circulate and enable a culture to represent itself as legitimate, moral, valuable and authoritative.'<sup>396</sup> Politically, Constantine was clearly using Christianity as a means of unification.

Before encountering the enemy, a prayer for use by the troops was agreed by the two emperors, and was presented in epistolary form. The *Summus Deus* commended the imperial cause to God and requested divine aid. It would also appear that Constantine had urged Licinas, in his forthcoming campaign against Maximin, 'to place his armies under the protection of that heavenly power which had granted his own armies victory over Masantius'.<sup>397</sup> Composed by the two emperors to 'the advantage and security of the state'<sup>398</sup> it reveals a defining moment for the hoped unification, not only of political and heavenly power but also of a highly eclectic selection of religious beliefs and practices. Licinas entered Nicomedia in triumph, and issued the following constitution to the governor of Bithynia:

When both I, Constantine Augustus, and also I, Licinas Augustus, had happily met at Milan, and debated all measures which pertained to the interests and security of the state, we considered that among other matters which we saw would benefit a large number of persons, the very first that required regulation was that wherein was comprised respect for divinity; that we should give both to the Christians and to take all others free power of following whatever religion each

<sup>395</sup> Grant *ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>396</sup> Colebrook *op cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>397</sup> A. H. M. Jones *op cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>398</sup> Grant 1971 *op cit.*, p. 266.

individual wished, in order that whatever Divinity there be in the heavenly seat can be appeased and propitious to us and to all who are placed under our rule.<sup>399</sup>

This constitution would ensure Divine favour for the state by its commendation to worship the '*Summa Divinitas*', the very use of the term suggesting that Constantine wished to present the idea of religious plurality and appeal to as many Neoplatonists as possible. Loyalty and incentive would be elicited by the return of previously confiscated church properties.<sup>400</sup> The commendation further assumed a united body of Christians as its subjects, and concluded by granting religious toleration ostensibly to Christians being followed in 313 by the Edict of Milan, which officially terminated the persecution of Christians. Organised Christianity was a vehicle for a controlling power defined by its imperial, military activity. By accident, his choice to pay homage to the Christian God had given Constantine the ultimate earthly power of the Roman Empire. Though the empire and Christianity had no shared ideological or spiritual objective, Constantine forged the crucial link by becoming a Christian, his new religion unifying a hitherto weakened empire. As a new convert to the faith, he realised that a stable empire could not be built upon hundreds of conflicting interpretations and multiple texts about Christ and His identity. This, together with the fact that he was 'rewarded' with victory, made Constantine believe that his power had been appointed by God. The first general council of the Christian church, was convoked by Constantine in 324 CE from May 20<sup>th</sup> to August 25<sup>th</sup> of 325. He ordered bishops and theologians to meet at Nicaea to decide once and for all what had been done and said by Christ, and to standardise it in a text. However, this was not truly an act of faith for there was considerable pressure to provide Constantine with the doctrines that he had requested. Constantine forced an agreement of opinion, without which he would withdraw his support for the new church.<sup>401</sup> Despite the fact that those who signed their names to the creed apparently did not understand it, it seemed to solve questions of whether Christ was human or divine. It established 'some

<sup>399</sup> Extracted in A. H. M. Jones *op cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>400</sup> For an in-depth discussion see Freeman *op cit.*, pp. 157 - 180.

<sup>401</sup> See N. Douglas - Klotz, *The Hidden Gospel: Decoding the Spiritual Message of the Aramaic Jesus* (Oxford: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1999) Douglas - Klotz points out the massive compromises which were made to appease Constantine 'since the sun-god was very popular in Roman culture, the council declared the Roman "Sun" day to be the Christian Sabbath.' p. 13.

version of what is called the Trinity – a belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as an orthodox doctrine of the Western Christian Church.’<sup>402</sup>

Constantine maintained the title Pontifex Maximus. Despite what the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* says about Constantine being ‘captivated by Christianity’ and giving it the protection of the state, he had rather captured Christianity within the confines of state control. Constantine saw himself as Pontifex Maximus of Christianity - or its bishop in matters external - with title rights of supervision and control over religion. While he called upon the Christian God for Divine aid he ‘knew and cared nothing for the metaphysical and ethical teaching of Christianity when he became a devotee of the Christian God: he simply wished to enlist on his side a powerful divinity who had, he believed, spontaneously offered him a sign.’<sup>403</sup> His conversion was clearly due to a dreamt meteorological phenomenon, which he had happened to witness at a crucial point in his career. Luckily, and perhaps *only* luckily for Christianity, Constantine looked at the skies, read the political signs, and founded a Christian state which was to mutual advantage: ‘[i]mperial favour was crucial to the success of Christianity.’<sup>404</sup> His conversion moved the church from a position of illegality to favour, from interloper to governor, within a Holy Roman Empire. Along with the conversion of a military dictatorship its non - Christian subjects were rapidly converted. By 361 the Council of Constantinople issued the Nicene - Constantinople creed, officially stating that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father *and from the son*.<sup>405</sup> After fifty years of divisive controversy over whether Jesus was the same as God or an aspect of God, Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) provided the acceptable solution that there is one Godhead, though the Godhead has three distinct personalities. Ironically, as already observed, the idea is taken from the *Enneads*, and is purely Neoplatonic. In its Christian guise, the concept unifies the church, and makes orthodox Christianity the religion of the

<sup>402</sup> Douglas - Klotz. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>403</sup> A. H. M. Jones *op cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>404</sup> Lynch *op cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>405</sup> Lynch *ibid.*, p. 165. Eleven years after winning the battle at the Milvian Bridge Constantine murdered his already vanquished rival Licinius, former Emperor of the East and killed his wife, boiling her alive in her bath. These don't seem to be the actions of a follower of Jesus. In fact only at his death was he baptised, renouncing forever the purple of his imperial rank. At the Council of Nicaea Constantine had his father Constantius deified, and would be accorded the same honour after his own death, thereby taking equal deity with Jesus in the divine hierarchy. Constantine's late baptism perhaps signifies a realisation of something fundamental to Christian thought: that nothing material, especially taken by force, cannot be taken away again. His baptism and the relinquishing of the material trappings of empire was most likely an insurance policy.



Roman State, giving it the most privileged position in Roman society. In an attempt to delimit the meaning of Christian scripture, patterns of enunciating power operate through constitutions of rigid exclusion. The council at Nicaea banned all versions and writings on the Gospels except those of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, burning or hiding the rest.<sup>406</sup>

What is clear is that the Christianity which is absorbed into Rome's militaristic, sacrificial culture, is severely compromised, but *must* compromise in order to promote itself and survive. Nevertheless, the mode of its sponsorship and subsequent synthesis by this culture is one of expedient and political convenience. Constantine makes a typically imperious statement that 'We have received from the Divine Providence the supreme favour of being relieved from all error',<sup>407</sup> never really seeing himself as anything but a god, though all the time represented as a champion of Christianity by his biographer Eusebius. H. A. Drake's recent study points to a pragmatic and ruthless Constantine who would do anything to support his political rule, creating a 'neutral public sphere' to produce a stable coalition between religions.<sup>408</sup> Constantine's 'vision' at the battle of Milvian Bridge is, under these terms, a point of realisation that a reported vision underpinning a victory could gain him the support of Christianity. Charles Freeman emphasises that this was not Constantine's first encounter with deity, and that he had been keen on several occasions to legitimate his reign with support from the gods: 'By 310, when he asserted his descent from Claudius Gothicus, he claimed that Apollo had appeared to him in a vision (clearly Constantine's favoured method of receiving divine messages), offering him a laurel wreath and promising that he would rule for thirty years.'<sup>409</sup> Constantine's real concern with the Christian church was as a stabilising force to his regime. Subsequently, any chance that the Hellenic thought of a philosopher such as Porphyry should be canonical or disseminated was, for the time being at least, repressed under the new ideology of Christian revelation.

<sup>406</sup> Douglas - Klotz. *op cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>407</sup> Cited by Freeman, *op cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>408</sup> H. A. Drake 'Constantine and Consensus', in *Church History*, vol. 64 (1995) p. 7, also cited by Freeman, *op cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>409</sup> Freeman *op cit.*, p. 162.

## APPENDIX B

WHY IS A COW BELOW A LETTUCE? THE ANOMALOUS PLACEMENT OF  
THE ANIMAL IN BARTHOLOMAEUS ANGLICUS' *DE PROPRIETATIBUS*  
*RERUM*

Turning animals into texts forces physical bodies to conform to the notion of creation as an ordered formation. As an early encyclopaedia, Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* places the animal within an easily accessible, logical structure. This structure is defined both pedagogically, in relation to recognised authorities, and logically, being one of the first alphabetised reference books. Technically, the form of the work may be seen as twofold (*duplex*). Firstly, the structure (*forma tractatus*) is compiled from the perspective (*modus agendi*) of human science. Typically logical, this operates at the level of each chapter and is generally alphabetised: 'for kyndes and propertes of bestes beþ descryued in generale ... in singuler and in special and þat by the ordre of a. b. c.' (*DPR* 1. 1). Secondly, the form of treatment (*forma tractandi*) is organised in accordance with clear definition (*modus definitivus*) where each entry consists of the opinions of a range of authorities.

While the *DPR* offers an apparently uncomplicated commentary upon creation with God at the top of a descending hierarchy, the placement of the animal in the structure of the work as a whole seems puzzlingly inconsistent. There are generally accepted endorsements that the internal hierarchal logic of the *DPR* is provided by Aristotelian thought,<sup>410</sup> but unlike Aristotle Bartholomaeus apparently 'displaces' the animals of chapter eighteen (*De animalibus*) by situating them above the final book (nineteen: colours, liquids, odours *etc.*) though below all other things.<sup>411</sup>

<sup>410</sup> When Bartholomaeus quotes authoritative commentaries on Aristotle, they tend to be taken from earlier translations of *Historium animalium*. However, the majority of 'direct' references to Aristotle are taken from Michael Scot's complete translation, and Avicenna's contemporary translation and commentary upon *De animalibus*. See Seymour, *op cit.*, p. 209 ff.

<sup>411</sup> D. C. Greetham *op cit.*, discusses the peculiarly generic organisation of the *DPR* but does not engage with structural anomalies. The most comprehensive single study, though which again does not

Bartholomaeus' observations, often beginning with the etymological *explicatio* associated with Isidore of Seville, highlight this inconsistency. We are told that 'Letuse hatte *lactuca* and hap þat name of plente of humour, as Isider seiþ, oþer for it makeþ ofte mylk in wommen þat norrishiþ and feediþ children ...' (DPR 17. 92). This is a straightforward statement whose focus on the significance of words as signs characterises the literal sense of the text. However, the statement also begs a question: how can a lettuce, here introduced by highlighting the root of its Latin name and its semantic association with lactation, be logically hierarchised above a cow in an Aristotelian scheme in which we would expect to find animals above vegetation and below man? Indeed, where we might expect a direct concordance between the structural methodology of Aristotle's *De animalibus* and Bartholomaeus' DPR this is not immediately apparent.<sup>412</sup>

This is less a structural anomaly, than a problem of textual interpretation. The text's Christian version of Aristotle's hierarchy takes an essentially biological knowledge system and extends it to the realm of 'insensibles.' Accordingly, we expect and find a creation with God at the top of descending or hierarchical version of natural order. Such an effortless general framework of *speculum naturale* though, operates on principles that have inadequately sharp and over-simplified boundaries, producing a moment of undecidability between Christian and Aristotelian interpretative strategies.<sup>413</sup>

Indeed, this apparently simplistic configuration obscures another principle of categorisation. In Bartholomaeus' initial *definitio*, where science is delimited and the

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discuss the structure, is Elizabeth Brockhurst's 'Bartholomaeus Anglicus "De Proprietatibus Rerum"', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1952).

<sup>412</sup> While the placement of the animal is different, the nineteen books of the DPR evoke the nineteen books of Aristotle's *De animalibus* (*Parts of Animals*) and its *Libro i*, in which Aristotle defines a hierarchy or laddering of animal existence. In *Libro i*, Aristotle defines an upward movement from the lowest animals. What Bartholomaeus calls 'dyuers[ite] of vertu' refers to the way Aristotle defines animal reproduction by blood and semen; as some animals have more blood and are warmer blooded, they are considered higher.

<sup>413</sup> D. C. Greetham addresses some inconsistencies caused by the appropriation of classical fable material, as well as the other influences which seem to dictate Bartholomaeus' textual structure: 'Isidore's theory, with its sense of a real, as well as metaphorical, link between two areas of experience (the world itself and the words used to describe that world), is, of course, very attractive to Bartholomaeus and provides him not only with much incidental material but also with a further justification for the rationale of his own work.' Greetham *op cit.*, p. 674 (n).

subject area defined, he specifies that 'þe proprietees of þinges folewyth þe substaunce.' (*Proh.* 41). The aim of the work is to provide a comprehensive understanding of 'things', which means first defining their 'substance' as universals (the title is not about things - *De rebus* - but about the *properties* of things). Consequently, the animal is distinctly defined as an inhabitant of corporeal substance *alone*, and placed within the four elements that are the delineating and defining principle according to which books ten to eighteen are organised. From this perspective, the chapter on animals is clearly *not* at the bottom of the scheme. Rather, it takes the highest place in an earthly hierarchy whose lowest point is the Earth at book fourteen (*tractat de terra et eius partibus*) and from which point the progression 're-ascends' to the bestiary. Though man inhabits the corporeal context and its four elements, he also straddles both corporeal and incorporeal contexts, and has been dealt with accordingly in book three as a mixed substance. Being understood as a microcosmic circle, however, the created world manifests the four elements of the cosmos:

... þe world is iclepid alle þinges þat beþ contaeyned in þe roundenes of hevene, as heven in þe whiche þe sterre[s] schineþ, and *fyre* þat litip all þinge, *ayer* by þe whiche alle þing þat haþ lif breþeþ and þryveþ, *water* þat biclippip þe sides of þerþe, *erthe* þat susteyneþ and holdeþ vp and fidip al þis lowe þingis.' [*DPR* 8. 1, my emphasis].

In this context Bartholomaeus draws on the authority of Boethius, who states that such imperfect matter moves around the perfect immaterial: the created soul around the uncreated mind of God. Fire, air, water and earth represent a corporeal and concrete nature, moved by God. And it is in this sense that animals are an extension of God's creation and are clearly understood as corporeal signs in terms of biblical sapience and Boethian logic. Eternity is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life, made clear by the comparison with creatures that exist in time, or '*Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur*' (Rom. 1. 20). They are separate; though significantly, suggest similitude to the spiritual world.

The corporeal world and its elements, then, constitute a structure symmetrical to the incorporeal. After the spiritual substances of books one to three (the creator, spiritual creation and the angels) and the mixed substances of books four to nine (man's spiritual and corporeal contexts), book ten is the first engagement with the exclusively corporeal forms of the *material*. Books ten to eighteen represent corporeal substance in relation to the delineation of the four elements surrounding earthly existence, or in Aristotelian terms the *matter of perceptible bodies* of fire, air, water, earth, and their natural manifestations. From fire at the highest point, discussion descends through the elements of air and water, and includes the things of those elements: birds, flying insects, and fish. The logical, downward Progression to the earth provides a foundation for the discussion to re-ascend through the things of the earth (mountains, countries, metals, plant life) of which animals are the *highest* group.

The reality to which the text conforms is a specifically literary one where Christian thought based on scripture - as a long static exposition - engages with Aristotle's 'natural' hierarchy. This constitutes a 'vertical' intersection, which problematises the narrative conduct of the text and its Christian exegesis, and in which the perfectly logical structural use of the four elements is at first sight obscure to modern readership. The Christian notion of hierarchy, in this sense, overrides an Aristotelian conception of the world to displace the animal to the bottom of the order of things, while never questioning this displacement.

## APPENDIX C

THE PLACEMENT AND DISPLACEMENT OF THE FEMININE IN  
BARTHOLOMAEUS ANGLICUS' *DE PROPRIETATIBUS RERUM*<sup>414</sup>

This appendix observes the unexpected inclusion of 'the feminine' in the book on animals in Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *DPR*. As the text is a compilation (*Compilatio*) of extracts the reader may expect - and will find - no commentary to explain this placement. But by way of explanation this appendix outlines some Aristotelian elements underpinning the *De animalibus* - book eighteen - of the *DPR* which result in the female being ordered in accordance with a peculiarly 'generic' organisation.

The first chapter of book eighteen of the *DPR* offers an overview 'in general' of Aristotle's definition of what the 'animal' is, while the proceeding chapters deal 'in special' with the essential determining characteristics of each beast. Bartholomaeus' aim is to report all the particular things known about what Trevisa translates as 'animal, a beste'.<sup>415</sup> Included in the alphabetically ordered chapters is '*De femina*', or the feminine. If there was a masculine equivalent, *De mare*, we might suppose that the two would serve to offer comparison and distinctions between the male and female of any chosen species. But as there is no equivalent 'male' chapter this inclusion is extraordinary, presenting an apparent anomaly.

Explanation may begin by the observation that the *De femina* does not apply to human females in particular but to the female of any species, as the etymological explication illustrates: 'The femel hatte femina and haþ þat name of *femur*, þat is 'þe þies', for in these partyes between þe þyes is distinctioun and dyuersite betwene male and femele.' This at once presents a possible solution to the anomaly, in that the Aristotelian principle of the text's organisation prescribes definitions which are determined as

<sup>414</sup> A version of this appendix was printed as a note entitled 'The placement and displacement of the feminine in John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* in *Notes and Queries* vol. 50, issue. 1, March 2003, pp. 11 – 13.

<sup>415</sup> Unless otherwise indicated quotations are taken from '*De femina*', 18. 49 of the *DPR*.

universals. The aim of the encyclopaedia, as stated in the *prohemium* or preface, is to understand the properties of 'things' by first defining their 'substance' as universals. For Aristotle only the universal or secondary substance is scientifically knowable: 'animal' and 'man' are secondary substances and knowable, 'Mary' is a first substance and is not. In terms of mankind, who is an animal before anything else, the definition of the female must also begin with the most basic denominator, or beast-like 'parts' of the species of animal that man is. Mankind's primarily animal existence, and the reproductive animality of his humanity, provides this primary scientific definition.

In a previous book, the 'animal' part of the human (*Humo*) is said to be of 'þe erþe'. But man is '*Antropos*' or 'arered vp' (*DPR* 3. 1) to face his god, evidently glossing Aristotle's *Parts of Animals*.<sup>416</sup> The female of any species is more closely associated with the process of reproduction, with earthy and earthly animal acts, than is the male. But as mankind has reason, he 'schal seche heven and nou3t putte his þou3t in þertþe and be obedient to þe wombe as a best.' (*DPR* 3. 1). In Aristotle's biology the female of any species is primarily defined, then, by the corporeal animal state and while the male also inhabits this state, in the process of generation he is the informing clause, or soul, who can be seen to bring nothing immediately material to the biological process of generation.

This is explained when we are told that mother means 'matiere' or matter, to which the male gives his form in the process of regeneration: 'Aristotil seiþ þat in gendrynge of brood þe femel is as it were matiere and the mate is forme and schappe. And of boþe comeþ semen and of medlyng þerof comeþ þe creature. And þerfore I say þat mal and femel ben as it were pricipalte of genercioun, and þe mate is a[s] forme and schap and þe female as matiere.' The soul is the form of the body (*anima est forma corporis*) which by informing matter gives the principle of bodily structure, sensation and thought to produce the concrete entity comprising both 'form' and 'matter.' While form is embodied in individuals it is separate from material production and pre-existent to the act of generation: 'The producing agent was pre-existent ... the process of the child's formation is what it is because the parent was a man ... semen is the source of things that are generated.'<sup>417</sup>

<sup>416</sup> *Parts* 656 a., 10 - 15.

<sup>417</sup> *Parts* 640 a. 25 ff

In this way Aristotle explains the character of a biological individual not by recourse to species essences defined *per genus et differentium*, but by the effect of the father's form upon the mother. The imprint, interjected into the *materia* of the maternal body, is the realm of the father, suggesting his function as both a site of origin and a *disembodied* delivery system. The role of the maternal body, on the other hand, is functional, destined as it is to become an embodied or corporeal delivery system producing a genital outcome.

In the corporeal context existence and experience by a soul depends upon its infusion into a corporeal body, biological function being prerequisite to the soul's earthly existence. In order to facilitate earthly existence bodies must be reproduced. Thus the desire to reproduce is in itself an animal act, separate from the aspirations of the soul. The *De femina* informs us that the female 'desireþ more þan þe male', and it is this desire to reproduce which accordingly manifests itself in the most actively material sex, the prime 'principle of generation' in the corporeal context - the female.

This being so, the placement of the feminine in the bestiary is a quidditative one. This is to say that the defining factor of the universal 'animal' is its ability to regenerate, resulting in the inclusion of the female, whose essentials as principle of generation are explained at the 'scientific' or biological level of the text. Mankind, having quiddity as an animal, is also defined by generation. Even at this biological level an essentially corporeal mankind is understood to be 'arered vp' to face God. Outside of the delimitation of the *De animalibus* the animal, in other words, is always explained in relation to its highest point of definition - that of mankind and a superior intellect. But within *De animalibus* the inclusion of *De femina* is not an anomalous placement. Rather, it defines the animal by female reproductivity at its most instinctive and functional, rather than at its most reasonable level.



## APPENDIX D

*DE PROPRIETATIBUS RERUM: LECTIO AS CONTEXT*

There is no in depth criticism or appraisal of the structure, purpose, and potential textual anomalies presented by the DPR. Indeed, so vast a work presents a range of potential readings. To delimit the encyclopaedia to its scholastic context, and to see it as a *lectio* text, is to understand it as a work of utility that is preoccupied with logic and order. *Lectio* was not just the reading out of a scholastic *summa*, but involved careful selection and explanation of the subject matter. As a lecturer (*Lector*) of texts, Bartholomaeus would have rehearsed logic to a scholastic audience. The scholastic *lectio* is distinctly different from its monastic counterpart, requiring a different kind of textual presentation for academic readers and listeners. While the *modus* of the *lector* in both contexts was to educate students to the truth through definition, analysis and deduction in the ‘lesser sciences’ than scripture, monastic *lectio* was ‘a spiritual exercise which involved steady reading to oneself, interspersed by prayer, and pausing for rumination on the text.’<sup>418</sup> However, the scholastic *lectio* offered a different textual presentation, containing extracts from works of respected *auctors*. It was a process of study involving a formal, logical reasoning process – a *ratiocinative* scrutiny of the text - illustrating modes of interpreting authoritative knowledge or in Bartholomaeus’ words, ‘to vnderstonde redels and menynges ... derkliche ihid’. (*Proh.* 41) It was mediated by a master who read books word by word to his students. During the course of the *lectio* words were defined, general points highlighted and obscurities clarified. Questions arising from the reading would be resolved by the further technique of *quaestio* involving oral argument (*disputatio*). So there is a sense in which the DPR should be seen as a pragmatically persuasive work rather than just a work of utility.

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<sup>418</sup> Parkes *op cit.*, p. 115.

The growth of an international student population at Paris in the early thirteenth century saw textual presentations change to accommodate the new focus on science, and the rise of the school. Consequently, works copied and produced in and before the twelfth century 'were better organised in copies produced in the thirteenth century.'<sup>419</sup> Accordingly, the *DPR* displays the practical unity of a *compilatio* of things and *auctoritates* designed as a readily accessible source for students, which is not available in similar works such as Isidore of Seville's earlier *Etymologies* (c. 620) or the Dominican Thomas de Cantimpre's *De natura rerum*. Isidore's *Etymologiae*, for example, have no logical structure, his twelfth book, *De animalibus*, relying on eight arbitrarily placed chapters on different types of animal.<sup>420</sup>

Reading the *DPR* as a *lectio* text allows us to see that logical ordering is one aspect of the text's design and purpose. It is both comprehensive and authoritative, and has logical indexing and systematic ordering. The overall scheme works from high to low, as stated in the opening line 'þe propirtees of þinges folewyth þe substaunce' (*Proh.* 1 - 4) which we are told is necessary in order to understand individual *things*.<sup>421</sup> Each book is divided into chapters, which represent topics (*tituli*) of which *De animalibus* is book eighteen, containing one hundred and seventeen chapters or '*capitulum*'. Bartholomaeus instructs his reader to expect 'þe ordre of a. b. c.' (*DPR* 12. 1). Where a logical progression, such as book five on the human body arranges its chapters in order from head to toe, book eighteen's animals have no natural order and are artificially, though logically, alphabetised.<sup>422</sup> To appreciate this point is to see the

<sup>419</sup> M. B. Parkes 'The influence of the concepts of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* on the development of the book.' In Alexander. J. J. G., & Gibson. M. T., eds., *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1976) p. 115.

<sup>420</sup> *De natura rerum* has the same purpose as Bartholomaeus' work, but while the *ordo* of the nineteen books is logical, it suffers from a lack of obvious progression from book to book. It is also much less comprehensive, most noticeable in the *separation* of the four elements from their physical manifestations.

<sup>421</sup> 1: God. 2: Angels. 3: The reasonable soul. 4: The bodily substance and its humours. 5: Man's body. 6: 'ages'. 7: Sickness and venoms. 7: The world and the bodies of heaven. 8: Time and parts of time. 9: Matter and form. 10: Air. 11: Birds and fowl. 12: Different bodies of water and the fish which inhabit them. 13: The Earth. 14: Provinces. 15: Stones and metals. 16: Herbs and plants. 17: 'Bestes'. 18: 'Of accidents,' colours, flavours, etc.

<sup>422</sup> Before this time *Distinctio* and *questio* would be inserted by the rubricator in the gloss, in the margin. The stages in the argument were 'carefully indicated by means of *litterae notabiliores* and paraph marks.' Bartholomaeus also employs a recently fashionable technique for scribes and rubricators - the running title. Parkes also draws attention to another device, which became utilised in the mid twelfth century, 'the analytical table of contents as a guide to the *ordinatio* and to facilitate the readers access to component parts of the work' - a striking feature of the *DPR* as *compilatio*. 'In the thirteenth century this led to the development of the notion of *compilatio* but as a form of writing and

necessity of understanding the generic status of the *lectio* text, because this facilitates our ability to understand it as literal and scientific. As such, there is no intended ‘hidden’ or allegorical meaning to the structural placement of animals that would complicate the logic of the structure. Bartholomaeus aspires to objectivity, and to show facts directly.

As a Paris *lector* Bartholomaeus would have been familiar with Peter Abelard’s *Sic et non* (1122). Its preface includes a definition of Scholastic *lectio*, and advocates the reconciliation of discrepancies found between different authorities. At the most elementary level of the *DPR* this is evident in the four chapters which present differing authoritative accounts of the elephant according to Isidore, Pliny, Aristotle and Avicenne, and Solinus. Abelard states:

*Quid itaque mirum si absente nobis spirito ipso, per quem ea et scripta sunt et dictata atque ipso quoque scriptoribus intimata, ipsorum nobis desit intelligentia? Ad quam nos maxime pervenire impedit insusitatus locutionis modus ac plerumque earundem vocum significatio diversa, cum modo in hac modo in illa significatione vox eadem sit posita.*<sup>423</sup>

In his prologue, Abelard argues that apparent contradictions can be resolved by modes of examination without undermining the authority of inconsistent texts. Indeed the *Sic et non* brings relevant views together ‘in such a way as to reveal their apparent divergence and even contradictoriness.’<sup>424</sup> As a method of critical analysis, the scholastic *Lectio* minimises areas of intellectual conflict by distinguishing different types of validity in argument. It raises difficulties for discursive comparison, and harmonisation by a synthesis of human reason and Aristotelian logic. With this

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as a means of making material easily accessible ... what was new was the amount of thought and industry that was put into it, and the refinement that this thought and industry produced. The transmission of these refinements on the page led to greater sophistication in the presentation of texts.’ In this sense, the *DPR* had a rapid international circulation due to its success as a coherently organised *compilatio* for theological study. Parkes *op cit.*, pp. 121 - 127.

<sup>423</sup> ‘So is it any wonder that, in the absence of the spirit itself through whom these were written, dictated and also directly imparted to their writers, we fail to understand them? An unfamiliar way of speaking and semantic variation in a good many expressions, which may be used now with this, now with that signification, combine to make their comprehension extremely difficult.’ See *Sic et Non: A Critical Edition* ed. by Blanche B. Boyer and Richard McKeon (London: University Of Chicago Press, 1976.) Fasci. i, p. 89, L 10 - 14.

<sup>424</sup> Minnis & Scott *op cit.*, p. 67.

intention, Bartholomaeus' conflicting versions of animals are included to be understood by one or more modes of reading. While the differing accounts of the elephant are apparently contradictory, variance of description is resolved by proximate textual comparisons, which aim to offer complementary perspectives.

In this way, Bartholomaeus is neither controversial nor critical. He does not question the authorities he uses, and relies on their 'objective' observation and commentary, enumerating the component parts of nature 'according to the principle "The more the better." ' <sup>425</sup> He places authorities side by side for comparison; he does not question what they have to say in the text, but leaves this to those who use the text. Authorities may conflict, but ultimately discord must be rationalised, rather than questioned. So while authoritative accounts of things may be consciously compiled to offer conflicting opinions for debate and study this same material, though divergent, could in turn be used to rationalise contradictions. There is clearly a desire to be logical in an Aristotelian sense, seen in the hierarchical index, books and chapters. While the *lector* would use the index for quick reference, the actual placement of things and animals might be irrelevant to him because he would not necessarily read the work in a linear fashion. Rather, his mode would be comparative, and his purpose would be to make selections from the Christian authorities on offer.

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<sup>425</sup> Curtius *op cit.*, pp. 92 - 93